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Sir Richard

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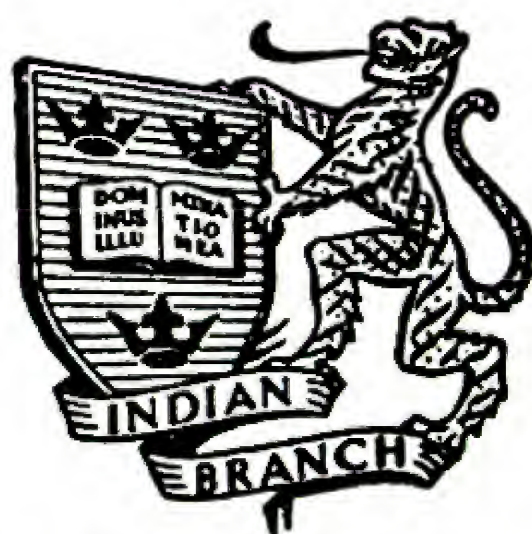
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# SOME TASKS FOR EDUCATION

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Oxford*



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## PREFACE

HOW often have men stood on the verge of the promised land and seen, near and tantalizing, the country of their dreams, only to be driven back again to the thirst and hunger of the wilderness! How often have they entered it for a brief period and then lost it by their follies and crimes! Shall we be more fortunate? How can we make ourselves more fortunate?

The following lectures are intended to be a small contribution to these questions—to raise them and to suggest partial answers. They were delivered in September 1945 at the University of Toronto: the first three on the Burwash Foundation at Victoria University, the last as the Sir Robert Falconer Memorial Lecture. The first and second lectures, somewhat abbreviated, have appeared in the *Atlantic Monthly*. Though not consecutive, all deal with aspects of a single problem—how to improve ourselves and our society by education. The first lecture raises questions about the education required to prepare us to live in the modern world, and calls attention to necessary equipment which is often overlooked. The second discusses our neglect of character training and suggests some steps that we might take about it. The third deals with the problem of creating a civilized democracy and compares the education of Greek democracy with our own. The fourth asks how men can be trained in the virtues of candour and impartiality.



I cannot close this preface without an expression of warm thanks to the generous hosts and friendly audiences that made my visit to Canada delightful both at the time and in memory.

R.W.L.

*November 1946*



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## I. EDUCATION FOR THE MODERN WORLD

Though everybody nowadays seems to know the  
*x y z* of everything nobody knows the *a b c* of  
anything.

BERNARD SHAW

I WILL start from some familiar phrases. 'We need a modern education for a modern world.' 'We have to prepare our youth to live in contemporary society and face its problems.' Such sayings, at first hearing, put heart into us. Their blunt common-sense immediately commends itself, and they seem to point straight to the curriculum we need. And then come second thoughts. Certainly we must educate our youth to face the problems of the day. But what precisely are they, and which are the most important? Certainly we should have a modern education for a modern world, but what is the exact meaning of 'modern'? In what sense is our world modern, that is, different from the world of a thousand or two thousand years ago? If uttered without much thought, as they often are, these plausible phrases may be only lullabies to put a problem to sleep.

In the last eighteen months I had two letters which threw some light on the questions asked in the last paragraph. One was from a professor of pathology, who in late life had been reading Plato in translation. 'I am still reading Plato,' he wrote. 'It is remarkable to meet the vague ideas that knock about one's head succinctly stated, and that at a date about two and a



half millennia ago; not to mention all the other things of which one has never thought at all.' The other letter was from an old school friend who wrote about his son in Burma, since killed. He says: 'I remember Jim telling me in one of his letters how, when not actually engaged in fighting he would sit in his dug-out and read Plato by the light of an improvised oil lamp. In another he spoke of always reading, before going into action, these two passages from Plato's *Apology*:<sup>1</sup> "A man who is good for anything ought not to calculate the chance of living and dying; he ought only to consider whether in doing anything he is doing right or wrong—acting the part of a good man or a bad." And, "Whatever a man's place, whether he has chosen it himself or been placed there by his commander, there he should remain in the hour of danger—he should not think of death or of anything but disgrace." ' Strange and significant—these lights, lit so long ago, burning undimmed in the Burmese jungle and in the face of death! Human nature changes little: otherwise Dante and Shakespeare would have ceased to have meaning for us. Human ideals change little: the Jews thought that the aim of man should be to do the will of God, the Greeks thought that it should be to achieve the excellence of human nature. After two thousand years we have not got beyond these ideals. Techniques of study may alter and new techniques need to be learnt, but the more important and deeper things do not alter; the sense of wonder in which the pursuit of knowledge begins, the ardour and persistence in it that no difficulty discourages, the power of seeing the world as it is, of distinguishing the important from the



unimportant, of knowing when a thing is proved and when it is not, still give science its power and meaning, as in the days when Ionian thinkers first set sail on its unknown sea, or when Socrates 'discussed human life, the meaning of religion and irreligion, beauty and ugliness, justice and injustice, reason and unreason, the state and the citizen, government and the capacity for it, and those other subjects, knowledge of which marks the true man'.<sup>1</sup> Because of these constants in humanity, the deeper human problems remain the same.

Clearly we must be careful about the word modern, which has two different meanings. It may mean contemporary in time; in this sense Plato and Epicurus, Shakespeare and Montaigne are not modern; it may mean contemporary in spirit: in this sense, they are—Plato and Epicurus perhaps more modern than Shakespeare and Montaigne. Modernity is a question not of date but of outlook.

After these cautionary remarks about the use of the word modern, let us consider what education is needed to prepare us for the contemporary world. Here it is essential to be clear what the problems of the modern world are and which are the most important. Superficially they seem to fall under two main heads. On the one hand are the social problems of our complex civilization—its trade and commerce and economics, its local and central government, its foreign contacts and international relations; on the other hand is the vast field of science and applied science. It would seem that our education should equip us to deal with these two sets of problems, that its two main departments should be the social sciences and the

<sup>1</sup> Xenophon, *Mem.*, 1.1.16.



natural sciences. Such an education would, it appears, cover the main needs of the modern world. Is this so, and would such an education be adequate?

First consider what, for want of a better phrase, I shall call an education based on the social sciences. 'It would be well,' says a recent book on the curriculum, 'if teachers made a conscious effort, both by the selection of material included in their courses and by their manner of handling it, to make clear to their pupils how a modern society is run and organized. All our citizens should have some knowledge of the ways in which natural forces are harnessed, materials transformed, goods manufactured and distributed, public services organized, paid for and controlled, the City and the State governed. They should, to some extent, understand what forces are at work changing and shaping our economic life and our social customs.'<sup>1</sup> Here surely is a modern education for the modern world. Is not this what we want?

I do not feel so confident. I may be unduly sceptical in thinking that, except in the hands of those rare teachers who can make any subject attractive, the average pupil would be bored by studying the organization of a world which he has not yet really entered, with which he has had very superficial contacts. There are, however, other criticisms to be made on such a curriculum. It is in itself a large order, but it omits still more than it includes; nothing is said of religion, languages, art, music; even science, literature and history are ignored, except in so far as they might be incidental to the subjects studied. Unless we are to drop these, is there any hope of escaping from an overcrowded curriculum? And overcrowding,

<sup>1</sup> *The Content of Education*, p. 32.



in education as in housing, means ill-health, and turns the school into an intellectual slum. Life in such a slum breeds a disease, common, serious and often overlooked. It does not teach the pupil the meaning of knowledge. It must almost inevitably consist of superficial information—there is no time for more. Smatterings make life interesting and have their uses; but their use is limited and they are the more dangerous, because they incline us to think that we know when we do not know. Uneducated people are a danger to the world, but they are not as dangerous as a less recognized menace—the half educated, who have learnt enough to express an opinion on subjects which they do not really know, but have never learnt to be aware of their ignorance. Such people are familiar pests in every department of life, and a main duty of education is to diminish their number. It cannot do this by giving the knowledge required—omniscience is not a practical aim—but it can show people what knowledge is, so that they are aware when they do not possess it, and it achieves this in a very simple way, by seeing that the pupil studies at least one subject in the curriculum so thoroughly and so far, that he knows what knowledge is, how difficult it is to attain, how much industry, thoroughness, precision and persistence it demands, if we are even to have a distant sight of it. A common fault of some modern forms of education is that they fail to do this, and it is a major weakness of the social studies curriculum in schools that it diffuses itself over a multiplicity of enormous problems, contents itself with a cursory view of them, and neither leaves time nor realizes the need for thorough and intensive study of any one. There is a much more serious weakness in



this type of education to which I will return later. Meanwhile I pass to consider the claims of an education based on natural science.

A secondary education based on the attempt to introduce the pupil to the social sciences inevitably leads to smatterings and superficiality and fails to give him an idea of the meaning of knowledge. No such criticisms can be made against a school curriculum based on science, for it necessarily involves exact and intensive study in at least one field. Further, though science and the scientific attitude are more than two thousand years old, applied science and technology are the most characteristic features of modern civilization, and their development, resting on pure science, has transformed the conditions of human life, and appears to have become its mistress and hope. An obvious conclusion is that, in keeping with this transformation, education should be transformed, that the weight should be thrown in the scale of science. It is a natural conclusion; but is it true?

Let me begin by saying that obviously science is one of the great achievements of man, and one of his noblest activities, that it offers the world almost boundless opportunities, and that, in its applied form, it is the most important new force in the present world. From this I should draw the practical conclusions: that we shall need in the future to produce a larger proportion of persons trained in its theories and its skills; and that everyone should have a clear sense of its significance and power in life. For those who are not specializing in science, this sense is probably better given through the history of science than through the study of any special branches in it, and



some knowledge of this ought to be regarded as an essential element in higher education.

Having said this let me pass to the limitations of science. It seems at first sight to have none. I went in 1944 into a laboratory in my own university, whose members were scattered all over the country and outside it on Government business. One was doing statistical work for the Ministry of Home Security with 150 people under him, one was in the Far East in connexion with chemical defence, one in Italy with the Medical Research Council Wound Shock team, one doing research for the R.A.F. In the laboratory I saw work in process on malaria, on jaundice, on wound therapy, and some secret work on gas warfare which had also yielded results of apparent importance for the treatment of venereal disease. These were the activities of one department in one university, to be multiplied, if one wishes to realize the total effects of science, a millionfold. Add to these practical results of science the atmosphere of which one is aware in any good laboratory, the enthusiasm, industry and patience, the ingenuity and burning intellectual life which drive the machine and in turn are generated by it. These scenes of practical power and beneficent activity are also homes of the great human virtues. Is it surprising if for a moment one feels that nothing else is worth study, nothing else matters, that science and her children are masters of all the kingdoms of the world and of the glory of them?

Then come second thoughts. Since 1914 we have fought two destructive wars. Science can explain much of the methods by which they were waged, but it tells us almost nothing of their causes, nor does it suggest how such disasters can be prevented. Clearly



there are realms where her writ does not run. It has equally little to say about those creations of the human spirit which alone are immortal, great literature or great art. When we read Homer or Dante or Shakespeare, listen to a symphony of Beethoven, gaze at the Parthenon or the paintings in the Sistine Chapel, science has little light to throw on what we feel or why we feel it. More goes to produce the effect of Leonardo's *Last Supper* than a wall surface, a variety of paint and the physical constitution of the human eye: Beethoven's symphonies are not merely the wood and metal and catgut and waves of air through which they pass into audible sound. Robert Bridges has admirably expressed these limitations of science:

What kenneth she  
Of colour or sound? Nothing; though science measure true  
Every wave-length of ether or air that reacheth sense,  
There the hunt checketh, and her keen hounds are at fault;  
For when the waves have passed the gates of ear and eye  
All scent is lost: suddenly escaped the visibles  
Are turned to invisible; the fine-measured motions  
To immeasurable emotions; the cypher'd fractions  
To a living joy that man feeleth to shrive his soul.  
How should science find beauty?<sup>1</sup>

Science is dumb if we ask it to explain the greatest human works or emotions or experiences,

Exultations, agonies  
And love, and Man's unconquerable mind:  
all that Shelley was thinking of when he wrote:

To suffer woes which Hope thinks infinite;  
To forgive wrongs darker than death or night;

<sup>1</sup> R. Bridges, *The Testament of Beauty* III, 765 ff.



To defy Power, which seems omnipotent;  
 To love and bear; to hope till Hope creates  
 From its own wreck the thing it contemplates.

This is to be

Good, great and joyous, beautiful and free;  
 This is alone Life, Joy, Empire, and Victory.

Here we are in a mysterious yet familiar world which belongs to Religion, Poetry and Art, but not to Science. Yet these things, as well as atoms and elements and cells, are part of the world.

Further, science is not her own master. What she does for us, depends not on her but on us. She comes with poison gas and atomic bombs in one hand, with anaesthetics and penicillin in the other. She is indifferent how we use them or which she makes. It is not her fault if we choose the atomic bomb; the choice is ours, not hers. The words good and evil are not in her vocabulary; their derivation must be sought in some other language.

The experience of Socrates still holds true. 'As a young man,' he says, 'I had an amazing passion for the branch of knowledge known as natural science—to know the causes of things, why they come into being, why they are destroyed, why they exist!' But these studies first fascinated and then left him disillusioned; the scientific account of the universe seemed to him accurate so far as it went, but inadequate and partial; he complained that the materialist rejected any spiritual explanation of the world, and then in effect invested nature herself with spiritual powers; and, in his absorption in scientific study, he felt that he ran the risk of 'losing the eye of my soul. I am afraid that my soul might become altogether blind, if I looked at things with my eyes or tried to grasp them



through the medium of the senses.' Other methods were needed to seek 'the truth of what is'.<sup>1</sup>

I have dwelt at some length on science in order to illustrate the danger of flying to phrases like 'a modern education for a modern world' without thinking what they mean. Though the development of science is the most characteristic and in some ways most important feature of our civilization, yet how incompletely it covers life, how much remains outside its sway and range, to how many of our needs and problems it has nothing to say! The 'modern world' is only partly modern and the most important things in it existed millennia before Darwin or Faraday or Rutherford. Applied science, technology, new techniques in government and economics, are only the changing dress of a human nature that changes all too little. Each age must learn to wear its peculiar dress and be familiar with its own techniques. But it must not be so fascinated with these as to ignore more permanent things. Shew your pupil Vanity Fair, since he must live in it; but let him be at least as familiar with the Delectable Mountains. It is the weakness of rich and complicated societies like our own that they tend to live in externals, to concentrate on the techniques of their life. But education, while it must provide for these, can only *base* itself on them at the expense of neglecting more important things. Such an education will produce mere technicians: by a mere technician I mean a man who understands everything about his job except its ultimate purpose and its place in the order of the universe. They are a very common type.

<sup>1</sup> *Phaedo*, 96 f. 99.



The complaint that I should make about those who wish to base education on the social or physical sciences is that they are aware of some needs of our time but not of its greatest need. Education has many tasks—training the intelligence, widening the mind and enlarging its interests, teaching the techniques on which modern civilization is based. But it may do all this and never reach our central problem. What raises man above the savage? His inventions, his science, the work of his engineers and chemists? We have only to consider recent history to see that these things do not necessarily civilize men, and may be consistent with a lower level of humanity than that of any savage tribe. If economics, science, technology and organization were all that were needed, there was nothing wrong with Germany. It is not our material civilization that is defective; it is ourselves. The real issue is whether men are to be ruled by power, pleasure or the latest bright toy which they have created, or by goodness, beauty, reason. People see the power of science, the importance of economics and governmental machinery. Certainly, but of what use are they, unless men know how to use them rightly? The more power science puts into our hands, the greater opportunities for evil as well as for good. A poor man, a poor world are limited by their poverty in the amount of harm they can do: as their wealth increases, their power to do harm increases. We live in a world where our power gives us the chance of doing unlimited harm: and we need an education which teaches us not merely how to use that power but how to use it well. To build up in every man and woman a solid core of spiritual life, which will resist the attrition of everyday existence in our



mechanized world—that is the most difficult and important task of school and university. Barbarian tribes destroyed the Roman Empire. There are no such tribes to destroy modern civilization from outside. The barbarians are ourselves. The real modern problem is to humanize man, to show him the spiritual ideals without which neither happiness nor success are genuine or permanent, to produce beings who will know not merely how to split atoms but how to use their powers for good. Such knowledge is not to be had from the social or physical sciences.

I have criticized the idea of an education based on either the social or the physical sciences. Now let me contrast with these two types an education which apparently is far less concerned with modern life, but which, however imperfect, contained more of the vitamins which the mind and spirit require—the education given under the old classical curriculum. It had (besides deficiencies in the actual teaching from which no education will ever be free) grave weaknesses. The worst was that it was given indiscriminately to those for whom it was suited and those for whom it was not. In consequence many sheep, who were hungry or at least capable of hunger, remained unfed and left school with their intellectual interests starved or undeveloped. This defect is the chief cause of attacks often made on classical education, and a great educational advance of recent years is that we are less inclined to force languages on pupils with no aptitude for them, and, going further still, are providing a parallel secondary education for those who think with their hands and in materials, not in words.



The other great weakness of the old classical curriculum was that in many, but not all, cases, it left boys in ignorance not only of science, but (what is far more serious) of the importance of science in the world. This defect could have been easily avoided without any loss to the classics and indeed with a gain to the understanding of Greek thought in which science and mathematics from the first played an important part.

Having said so much, let me return to the classical education as I knew it. (I must apologize for being personal, but one knows best what one has oneself experienced.) I learnt Greek and Latin pretty thoroughly, enough French to read it easily and some German; as much mathematics as I have ever needed; history, some of which was well taught but none left any deep impression on an immature mind; 'divinity', mostly in such a form that it gave me no knowledge of either religion or Judaism or Christianity, being largely concerned with the probable dates of some New Testament writings and with close attention to the explanation of such phrases as 'the abomination of desolation'; and some chemistry and other science, which was so taught as to leave nothing behind except a memory of totally wasted hours and a bitter sense of ignorance of a great subject. Such was much secondary education in late nineteenth-century England. Not a word of any of the subjects which the authors of *The Content of Education* mention as indispensable. Yet I believe that this education, with all its weaknesses, was better than the one which they propose.

It may be called narrow. Except for the gap in science—a gap for which the teachers rather than the



curriculum were to blame—I do not think so. Of course I left school ignorant of many things, desirable and important to know. To complain of this is to be guilty of the deadly heresy that education must be completed in school and university, that this is our last chance of learning, and, therefore, that we shall be forcibly crammed with all the food of knowledge needed for the journey of life. That heresy, often unconsciously held, is current and leads to educational damnation. The true faith is that education should send us out into life knowing thoroughly something which is itself first-rate, knowing how to learn, and interested in the world.

Any good education must be narrow. There is, of course, a pernicious, anaemic narrowness. But there is a healthy one too. Education prospers by economy, by exclusion. Two principles must be observed in it. The first is that certain subjects—they cannot be more and should hardly be less than two—must be studied so thoroughly that the pupil gets some idea what knowledge is. That lesson cannot be learnt by studying a large number of things; it demands time and concentration. The second principle is that these subjects should bring the pupil face to face with something great. Nothing—not all the knowledge in the world—educates like the vision of greatness, and nothing can take its place. Now the old classical education satisfied these two principles. Those whom it suited learnt two subjects pretty thoroughly, and thereby got a glimpse of what knowledge is and of the price which it exacts: and they met greatness in two great literatures. That is why I think that the education of the past was better—much better—than this attractive and plausible scheme which is to make



clear to the pupils 'how a modern society is run and organized'.

You are feeling: yes, but what have Greek and Latin to do with the twentieth century? I might reply that, with Christianity, they are its makers, and that a knowledge of the parents is a considerable help to knowing a child. I might say that fifth- and fourth-century Athens and Imperial Rome, in quite different ways, throw more light on our spiritual problems than any other ages, because they have more in common with us. I might add that our age, so confused and divided in its aims, could presumably learn something from a view of life, as clear, as rich in great achievement as that of Greece. And this view may commend itself the more to some people, because though, as the history of theology shows, compatible with Christianity, and, though, at its highest levels, always associated with theistic belief, Hellenism is not necessarily dependent on it. But instead of multiplying arguments, let me cite three distinguished witnesses for the defence. My first witness is the greatest living philosopher, Professor Whitehead. 'I will disclose one private conviction . . . that, as a training in political imagination, the Harvard School of Politics and Government cannot hold a candle to the old-fashioned English classical education of half a century ago.'<sup>1</sup> My second witness is the well-known critic, Mr Pearsall Smith. 'The Oxford School of *Literae Humaniores* seems to my mature judgement the best scheme of education that I have ever heard of . . . The subjects discussed are the eternal problems of thought, of conduct and of social organization. These are discussed, not by means of contemporary catchwords

<sup>1</sup> *Atlantic Monthly*, August 1926.



but by translating them back into another world and another language.’<sup>1</sup> My third witness is a man of action, whose life was spent in administration and politics, but a thinker also who saw beyond his own age—Lord Milner. ‘My own education, such as it is, was almost entirely classical, and classical in the old-fashioned sense. It consisted in reading closely, and often, certain great classical authors and trying to learn from them how to think and to express myself. With the exception of a little Political Economy, much of it wrong, which I have spent forty years in unlearning, I was taught practically nothing else. To the priceless privilege of having sat even for a few years at the feet of those august masters, breathing the atmosphere of their lofty thoughts and striving—alas how vainly!—to catch something of their perfect artistry in language, I owe whatever mental equipment—I might almost add, whatever moral inspiration—I carried with me into the battle of life . . . My gratitude to my old teachers has not grown faint; my allegiance to them is unshaken. And if their words now rise less readily to my lips, I would fain believe that I imbibed too much of their spirit to be ever wholly estranged from their sane and stately conception of what is best and worthiest in human life. . . . The study of the language and literature of Greece and Rome is incomparably the best road of approach to the study of all Language and all Literature and to a knowledge of the Mind and Character of man, or at least of civilized European man. I do not say that there are not other roads of approach, but this is the shortest and surest.’<sup>2</sup> These eminent witnesses have

<sup>1</sup> *Unforgotten Years*, P. 159.

<sup>2</sup> *Proceedings of the English Classical Association*, 1922, p. 26.



no doubt about the practical use of a classical education to those who have to live in the modern world.

A classical education has its dangers, but so has a 'modern' one. It is possible to develop myopia from too close attention to a subject, to be so familiar with one's own age that one cannot judge it. Those who are trained exclusively on 'modern studies' sometimes develop such myopia, become too exclusively familiar with their own age to judge it, suffer from a provincialism, self-centred, self-complacent but not self-knowing: for knowledge of self is difficult without a comparison with things and persons different from and better than oneself. It is at least as important to be able to criticize our civilization as to understand it, to stand above it as to live in it, to see it in the setting of all time and as in some Last Judgement it will be viewed. As the Harvard Report justly says, 'One of the aims of education is to break the strong hold of the present on the mind'.<sup>1</sup> That sentence contains a profound truth, which needs pondering.

How are you to give the mind this training: to teach it to judge rightly its own age and itself? Only by showing it the greatest things which men have achieved or dreamed. So and only so it will have a standard, an example, an inspiration. We can find the achievements of men in history, and their dreams in literature,<sup>2</sup> which comes from, speaks to, and helps to keep alive, what, for want of a better word, we call the soul.

Still doth the soul, from its lone fastness high,  
Upon our life a ruling effluence send.  
And when it fails, fight as we will, we die;  
And while it lasts, we cannot wholly end.

<sup>1</sup> *General Education in a Free Society*, p. 70.

<sup>2</sup> I include in this word the literature of religion.



The reason why Greek has maintained its place in education is not because, in the unthinking cant phrase of today, it is a vested interest or a survival from the past, but because of its value as a food of the soul.

I may seem to have slipped into a plea for the study of Greek. That is not my aim. My plea is for the study of greatness and only of Greek because it is a supreme example of what is great, and because those who remain ignorant of its literature and thought miss one of the greatest achievements of man. Obviously only a small minority will ever learn the language; though those who do not, but who are interested in the problem of living, should at least read in English the *Apology*, *Crito* and *Phaedo*, and *Republic* of Plato. But my real point is that, one way or another, everyone should see human greatness, the highest reach and scope of the spirit of man. Education without this, whatever else it contains, remains poor and incomplete.

It may be thought that I exaggerate and that education does not neglect this most important of its tasks. If so, how can we explain the general modern ignorance of the Bible? There are many compelling reasons, secular as well as religious, why a knowledge of the English Bible should be a corner-stone in the education of any English-speaking person. No Christian can be satisfied if children grow up unfamiliar with the Book in which the origin, early development, and doctrines of Christianity are recorded, and in which we meet its Master. But even those who reject Christianity cannot deny that if we want to see greatness, on the one hand in spiritual vision and in moral teaching, on the other in narrative writing and in imaginative eloquence, there is nothing greater in



English than the Bible; and it is the richest treasure-house of our language. If we had any true sense and care for greatness, would its study be so often neglected in schools?

Mankind is engaged in painting a picture which may be called *A Design for Civilization*, without knowing exactly what it wishes to paint. However good their brushes and pigments, painters either in studios or in life do not succeed unless they have a clear idea of their subject. To know what it desires to be is the problem about which the modern world is most uncertain and to which (apart from certain groups and individuals) it pays least attention. My suggestion is that the subject of the picture which mankind is trying to paint is a world of human beings as perfect as human nature allows; that our model is, therefore, human greatness and goodness, and that we must start with a vision of these, derived from the only source we know—from the revelation in religion, in poetry, in history itself, of human nature at its best. That study should be the centre of all education: for our picture is the work of innumerable craftsmen all co-operating on a common work: they will fail hopelessly if they are ignorant of the design, and though their individual skill may vary, they must all at least be given some idea of what they are trying to paint.

The subject of the picture is man at his greatest and best, and when we are clear about this central figure, we can group round it the accessories of its life, the means through which man acts, achieves his purpose and becomes his fullest self: science, by which he increases his knowledge and control of the universe; politics and economics, by which he creates and



regulates the society that will best serve the good life; languages, through which he has access not only to his fellow men but to the collective wisdom of the world; industry and commerce, regarded not merely as means of making money, but, as Plato conceived them, as mothers and nurses that supply mankind with the necessities of life.<sup>1</sup> These accessories should be seen and studied with continual regard to the central figure and not, as they too often are, treated as independent forces, each to be elaborated for its own sake without any care for the real subject of the picture. An education of this kind is the modern education that the modern world needs. 'We should not,' says Aristotle, 'listen to those who tell us that human beings should think like men and mortals think like mortals, but we should achieve such immortality as we may, and strain every nerve to live by the highest things in us. They may be small in substance, but in price and power they are far beyond all else.'

<sup>1</sup> *Laws*, 918. See Ruskin, *Unto This Last*, ch. 1, for the same view.



## II. EDUCATION AND THE TRAINING OF CHARACTER

Types of Governments correspond to the types of human nature. States are made, not from rocks and trees, but from the characters of their citizens which turn the scale and draw everything after them.

PLATO

IF there were such things as Political Shows, machinery for the preservation of peace would be among the exhibits. There, in a row, would stand a succession of designs from the Holy Alliance (and earlier) down to the League of Nations, Treaties, Pacts, Covenants, Concerts of Europe, Military Conventions, Disarmament Projects, all of which began in hope and ended in failure. Many of them are powerful, many ingenious, but none have worked. Are the projects of our generation for preserving peace to be equally unsuccessful? It depends on whether we diagnose rightly the cause of our past failures.

Better institutions are greatly to be desired, but the efficiency of institutions, as of machines, depends on those who operate them. The fate of a new League or Concert of Nations will depend on those who work it. The evils of the world do not come, except in a minor degree, from bad political machinery and will not be cured by improving it. There is a truer philosophy in the Epistle of St James. 'From whence,' he asks, 'come wars and fightings among you?' 'Because,' we answer, 'the Disarmament Conference



failed, or the League of Nations was imperfect, or no one had thought of Federal Union, or Mr Chamberlain's diplomacy was weak.' St James was not the most intellectual of the Apostles, but his reply is more to the point: 'Come they not hence, even of your lusts that war in your members? Ye lust, and have not: ye kill, and desire to have.' The language may be old-fashioned, but here is the plain truth. Fundamentally the political problem is a problem of human character.

Let those who doubt this truism read any period of history in detail. I emphasize the words 'in detail'. It is one of our greatest errors in studying history that we generally study it on a small scale, in textbooks and outlines of history. They have their value, but they leave us with little idea of what history is. In the textbook, history appears simple—much too simple. It becomes an affair of years, not, as it is in the making, of weeks, days, hours. The struggles, agonies, passions, and uncertainties of the time disappear; the lines and wrinkles are smoothed out, leaving a characterless and rather uninteresting face. Issues which at the time were confused seem clear, dénouements obvious and inevitable, and we never realize how near to failure were triumphs that to us seem easy, or how close to success were complete and disastrous failures. The mischances and blunders of statesmen astonish us and we shut the book saying, like Puck, 'Lord, what fools these mortals be!'

Such is history, read even in the best textbooks and outlines. They show only tendencies, trends, movements, results; they give the scheme of events as an aerial photograph gives the shape and plan of a town, but they reveal no more of what really happens than



such a photograph reveals of the human life actually lived in the streets and houses of the town. To know that, you must leave your aeroplane, walk through the streets, enter the houses, and meet and mix with the inhabitants. Read textbooks by all means; but you will learn infinitely more from reading Macaulay's *History of England* or the three volumes of Trevelyan's *England Under Queen Anne*. There you will see what history is and what determines its course.

There are many determining factors: geography and geology, climate, economic conditions, scientific discovery; but above all there is the too often forgotten element of human nature. Not merely the accident of individual genius—the appearance of a Cromwell, a Chatham, or a Churchill, a Frederick or a Napoleon, a Washington or a Lincoln—but the working of more ordinary human nature: intellectual qualities—wisdom, intelligence, judgement, foresight, and their opposites; but still more, moral qualities—disinterestedness, courage, honesty, a sense of justice and fair play, patience and self-mastery and the power to endure and wait and persevere in a clearly seen purpose, and *their* opposites: greed, ambition, vanity, pride, jealousy, bad temper, the uncontrolled tongue, the faint heart, the desire for ease and comfort. All these factors, eliminated from outline histories, are revealed under the microscope of a detailed study and are seen to be main determinants of the course of the world for achievement or frustration, success or failure, good or evil. Man is the real problem, the old, the modern problem; for the new world is not so new: humanity changes its clothes but not its nature; Adam puts on a more elaborate and complicated dress but remains the old Adam.



At this point a reader may say: 'We have heard all this before: one cannot open a paper without finding someone saying that civilization is in danger of destruction because our growth in knowledge has far outstripped our growth in character. Why labour truisms which no one denies? You are preaching to the converted and boring them.'

I admit the justice of the criticism: I am talking truisms. But do we believe them to be true? And if so, why do we not do more about it? Why do we not try to bring our characters up to the level of our knowledge? Why do we not take seriously the words of Ruskin: 'Education does not mean teaching people to know what they do not know; it means teaching them to behave as they do not behave.' As it is, though the future of civilization depends on an improvement in human character and conduct, we leave the problem almost untouched, and devote our energies to constructing political machinery, ignoring the brittle human nature which so easily snaps, throwing the whole factory out of working.

Progress in engineering has come largely from improved metals; the maker of an aeroplane or an automobile knows that success depends on the quality of his materials as well as on his manufacturing technique. Equally, progress in politics and life depends on getting improved human material—men who will keep the laws and covenants which are so easy to construct. The makers of states have yet to realize this, or at any rate to act as if they did. Innumerable books have been recently written about the future of the world and the problem of peace; they have discussed every conceivable economic and political project; but how many of them have shown any perception



of the obvious truth that human character is the most important element in the problem, or devoted any thought to the question of its improvement?

A complicated society quickly enslaves its members to its own creations: the characteristic creations of the age are its science and its elaborate machinery, economic, social, political; they demand—and rightly—much knowledge and close attention; and they can easily make men their slaves. Some people frankly embrace the slavery and think that we shall be cured by more science, more economics, better foreign languages and a dose of sociology. The past gives no colour to such dreams. The advance of these studies, valuable in itself, has left us morally almost where we were before it began: men are not less greedy, less cruel, less false than they were hundreds of years ago. Even those who realize that this treatment is not improving the patient's health show little signs of appreciating the real disease. Most proposals for 'the reform of the curriculum' aim at making the patient at home in the mechanism of civilization and adept in its techniques. In this vast frame the microscopic speck of spirit for which the frame exists is unnoticed and neglected. Yet an age rich in material resources is one where human beings most need strengthening in spiritual insight and self-control, so that they can dominate the forces which they have created, and say to them in the words of the Stoic, *ἔχω, οὐκ ἔχομαι*, 'I am your master, you are not mine.' We talk wistfully of a moratorium for scientific invention. The only moratorium possible and needed is one on its misuse, which, if we were wise and good enough, we could ourselves impose.

The human problem is the more urgent at the



moment because the whole moral basis of Western Civilization threatens to slide from under our feet. People talk, regretfully or lightly, of the decline of church-going, but hardly realize that it is the outward sign of the greatest change in the European view of life since the conversion of the Roman world to Christianity. For more than a thousand years the West, with but occasional questioning, has accepted a creed which ruled its thought and deeply coloured its conduct. That creed gave to what are called the Christian virtues and to the rights of the individual a supernatural sanction which is not found in the universe as interpreted by natural science. It inspired the shining examples of men and women who were the lights of their generation; for the rebellious, the heedless and the indifferent it built up a solid framework of traditional decent conduct within which their lives were lived; it was a court of appeal which asserted its law and condemned any infractions of it, and made offenders, if not penitent, at least uneasy. We can hardly expect, if the inspiration is lost, the framework shattered, and the court disowned, that things will go on quite as before, or that virtues will last when their basis and sanction disappears. Science has helped mankind greatly; but it gives no support to the theory of life commonly called humanism. 'The democratic liberalism of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries was the triumph of the Stoic-Christian strain of thought.' But Darwin's theory of Natural Selection is, 'as it applies to human society, a challenge to the whole humanitarian movement . . . Instead of dwelling on the brotherhood of man, we are now directed to procure the extermination of the unfit. Again, the modern doctrines of



heredity, gained partly from the experience of breeders of stock, partly from practical horticulturists, partly from the statistical researches of Francis Galton, Karl Pearson, and their school, partly from the laws of heredity discovered by Mendel,—these doctrines have all weakened the Stoic-Christian ideal of democratic brotherhood.’<sup>1</sup>

We may not realize what we are losing but we can hardly mistake the effects of the loss. In the last twenty years the West, at the height of its civilization, has seen human nature guilty of crimes to which history has no parallel. The ruthless iniquity of Hitler’s policy may be matched in the past, but not the systematic extermination of the Jews or the horrors of the concentration camps. The cruelties of the Russian revolution exceed those of any other revolution in extent if not in degree, and are not less inhuman or shocking because they were associated with a great social reform. Less startling, though more significant, is the appearance in both countries of new philosophies to rule life—Blood and Soil in Germany, in Russia something more indeterminate which has not yet taken definite shape. Bolshevism and Nazism are sometimes called new ‘religions’. Certainly they are the evidence of a void in the mind, of the need of some firm principle by which to govern life and conduct, a god to call upon, proclaim and worship. One cannot too often recall the profound words of Pascal, ‘It is the nature of man to believe and to love: if he has not the right objects for his belief and love, he will attach himself to wrong ones.’ Are we providing our citizens with true objects of love and

<sup>1</sup> A. N. Whitehead, *Adventures of Ideas*, pp. 44 f.



belief? If not, where will they fix their love and their belief?

Education, it seems to me, is not enough concerned with this problem. Since the war, there has been a keener perception of its importance, a livelier interest in it; but the interest has been (at least in England) mainly in educational machinery—types of schools, curricula, and so forth—not in that major task of education, the improvement of character. Educators seem interested in providing for everything except the most important ingredient in life. Some schools, no doubt, do provide for it well; some do so moderately; none probably would disclaim it as one of their aims. But there is nothing in our modern educational theory comparable to Plato's *Republic*—still the greatest of all books on education. For Plato saw what we ignore, not only that education is the basis of the state, but that the ultimate aim and essence of education is the training of *character*—to be achieved by the discipline of the body, the will, and the intelligence; therefore, he planned his whole scheme to this end, yet in such a manner that intellectual education was in no way distorted or ignored, that the intellectual and the moral coincided. We, where we attack the problem at all, do so in an amateur and haphazard way.

It is not surprising that human character has not improved, for we have never taken its improvement seriously in hand. We have spent time and careful thought on physical health; but what have we done comparable for the health of the character? Our system of spiritual or ethical medicine (if I may so phrase it) is in much the same position as medicine itself in the eighteenth century: good in patches, but



wholly inadequate and generally unprogressive, and needing, if any real advance is to be made, hard thought, exact study, and methodical treatment.

Three objections will probably be made to the suggestion that we should do more to train human character for its tasks in the world. It will be said that we already do it; that it cannot be done; that it is very dangerous to attempt it.

Let us consider these objections in turn. Something has been done, it is true, to train human character; and here and there a success has been achieved which shows what immense advances are within our power if the problem is taken seriously. But in general the garden of school is tended by conscientious men, who are content with things as they are, but who have never considered whether methods of cultivation cannot be radically improved and better varieties of flowers produced. If anyone really thinks that we are tackling the problem effectively, he has only to open his eyes and look at the world, not ignoring his own people.

But we need not therefore exchange complacency for despair, or agree with critics who say that nothing can be done, that character cannot be changed, that men are fettered in the prison of human nature. We are like the man in Mark Twain's story who spent sixteen years in jail and then opened the door, which had been unlocked all the time, and walked out; we are in a prison in which humanity has been content to serve a needlessly long sentence and from which, with rather more effort, it could escape. For the remarkable thing is how easy it is to train character. Indeed, it is alarmingly easy. Consider what Hitler, who has justly been called an 'arch-educationist', did



in six years with German youth. Or turning to the school, consider what Thomas Arnold of Rugby did, partly by the force of his character, partly by means deliberately chosen, but without any elaborate study of the problem.

I have much more sympathy with the third type of critic, who says that the moulding of character is too dangerous an operation to undertake. But I note that his attitude is that of the servant in the Parable of the Talents, who was alarmed at the adventurous methods of his fellow servants, took no risks with his talent, and was condemned for not making use of his opportunities. And in fact you cannot educate a child at all without forming its mind. Do sensible parents bring up their children as greedy, dirty, cruel, selfish, false? Be as libertarian as you will, you are still 'prejudicing' the mind in a particular direction—to libertarianism; the choice is yours, not the child's. You are 'conditioning' it to feel that a certain atmosphere, which you approve, is good, and that its opposite is bad.<sup>1</sup>

If we really wish a child to grow up unwarped by any external influence, we must take a leaf out of the book of the Egyptian king who, wishing to discover the natural language of men, 'took two newborn children and gave them to a shepherd to bring up among his flocks. He gave charge that none should speak any word in their hearing; they were to lie by themselves in a lonely hut, and in due season the shepherd was to bring goats and give the children their milk. Psammetichus did this because he wished to hear what speech would first come from the children's

<sup>1</sup> This point is considered more fully in *Education for a World Adrift* (American edition entitled *On Education*), pp. 112 f.



lips, when they had passed the age of indistinct babbling.’<sup>1</sup> Our libertarians are less thorough in their experiments than Psammetichus.

Of course, any attempt to train character is dangerous and must be undertaken with full perception of its danger. Many notes must be harmonized if the full music of the human instrument is to sound: gentleness and courage, boldness and prudence, inquisitiveness and reverence, tolerance and firmness, confidence and humility, stability and freedom. It is a difficult and risky attempt to make a man, and it is tempting to turn aside from the task. But we have only to look round to see the disastrous results of declining it, as, for the most part, we have hitherto done.

There is, I believe, a sign of coming change, no greater at the moment than the ‘little cloud out of the sea, like a man’s hand’, which Elijah saw in the rainless skies over Carmel. The last war produced the phrase, ‘self-determination’, out of which little good came. This war has produced another phrase, the ‘re-education’ of enemy countries (in the last war we never talked of re-educating Germany), and the word has a significance beyond its surface meaning. It is the first sign that we are beginning to appreciate the true nature of the political problem, and to see that it is a question of human nature rather than of organization. It is only a hint: the idea at present is vague and limited to the re-education of our enemies. We have not yet decided what re-education means or how it is to be done, much less made any start with it; nor have we considered that we ourselves as well as Germany and Japan may need re-education.

<sup>1</sup> Herodotus II. 2.



But the emergence of the phrase is significant of things to come. Re-education is what the world needs. It can be achieved only if we attack it frontally with clear knowledge of the aim in view and exact consideration of the best means to achieve it.

In a future not, one hopes, too distant, we may see something in education corresponding to the practice of medicine. If a person is inclined to bronchitis, if he is weak in some of his organs—his heart, say, or his lungs—a doctor prescribes for him a certain regimen. If he is rheumatic, he is warned not to do certain things and is told to do certain other things. In physical medicine a treatment is devised to preserve health and to guard against the particular disease to which the individual is inclined. Might we not, should we not, have a similar aim and comparable treatment in education to preserve the health of the character? Parents and, to some extent, schoolmasters try to produce antidotes to the undesirable tendencies of their pupils, but might not that practice be carried much further? Might we not devise a system of education which shall try to cure the weaknesses to which human beings are inclined and to encourage the virtues which they require? We do it to some extent, but might we not do it much more methodically and scientifically? No doubt a system of moral or spiritual medicine would be uncertain and tentative, but so also is physical medicine.

How should we proceed? We should decide what virtues we require and the best way to develop them. We should note the merits and defects of our own and other nations and try to discover their origins. We should consider the special weaknesses of our own



age, the peculiar temptations and dangers, moral and spiritual, to which it is exposed, and how to counteract them. We shall get increasing help from psychologists, indispensable though dangerous advisers, whose theories may be advantageously checked by common-sense, by the practical knowledge of which a great store is locked up in the minds of active teachers, and by the study of actual experiments in 'teaching men to behave as they do not behave', in the making of character.

All great educational thinkers have been interested in the problem, but experiments are more instructive than theories, because theories show what is hoped, experiments what is achieved. Some of these experiments show how much can be done when a real attempt is made to mould character. One of the most interesting examples comes from England. It is unfortunate that Thomas Arnold, the great headmaster of Rugby, is best known in the present age from Lytton Strachey's caricature. A real introduction to the man and his work can be found in the *Life* written by one of his pupils, Dean Stanley. There we see an educator who knew what he wanted to do, held that education is, above all, concerned with character, and believed that character must be trained through the intellect as well as in other ways.

Arnold was as wholehearted in his aim as Plato, but his methods are less thought out, and they belong more to his own time. He is the greatest figure in English education, and he created an ideal, a type, and a method which have profoundly influenced the nation and still persist. One would study also such different experiments in character-making as that of Vittorino da Feltre, and the training of a Jesuit, and



many more, past and present. They must be studied objectively and without prejudice, with an eye to their failures and defects as well as to their success, that we may know not only what to imitate but what to avoid. Nor should we omit experiments that we may mistrust or condemn, such as those of Soviet Russia (of which we know very little at first hand) or of Nazi Germany.

Finally, we may learn something from a remarkable experiment to which England has recently been forcibly submitted. Since 1939 we have had an education in behaviour which may have done little for our knowledge or brains but has had a powerful and mainly beneficial effect on our characters. It has been given outside our schools and universities and by a rough teacher—the war. Britain between 1940 and 1945 was a better country than in 1939. There was infinitely less ‘passive barbarism’; there was some of the littleness of man but far more of his greatness, in both sexes and in all classes and ranks of life. That is suggestive and instructive. ‘The effect of the war on human character’ would make a good subject of study for anyone interested in our problem. If we note what has given us this new spirit in war, we might devise means that would keep it alive in the difficult world of peace.

War gives a twofold education. It imposes a great common purpose on a nation, which burns up minor and meaner forces in its consuming flame. And it imposes the attitude and conduct which result from a common purpose. The nation becomes something like a society—a band of companions; in fact it becomes a nation. What lessons can our post-war education learn from the schoolmaster, war? How can we



retain in peace these two things which war has temporarily taught us: a great common aim and the spirit of fellowship?

I am proposing a methodical and thorough preparation for an important operation, and the following remarks are not intended to be anything but very elementary first aid. I suggest that there are two main elements of character training and that the work is incomplete if either is neglected; and I ask you to consider whether we take much trouble about either.

The first element is training in social behaviour, a difficult and generally neglected task. Self-centred, self-willed creatures as most of us naturally are, it is our fate to be citizens, members of a community. Men are born to four citizenships: they should be able to live as good members of their family, of their community, of their nation, and of the whole human society. How many of the world's troubles can be traced to a failure in one or other of these citizenships—to our never mastering the art of living with others, in the family, in the community, in the nation, in international relations! I have put them in order of ascending difficulty; in the art of living as good members of the human race, men have almost everything to learn.

Here I am speaking only of citizenship in the accepted sense—membership of a nation. It means that we must learn to live with others and respect their rights and feelings. It also means that we have to play a part in the community, make a contribution to it, often accept the decision of a majority which goes against our private interests, opinions, and desires. Otherwise the community will not prosper and may



not survive, and in its shipwreck we shall be drowned.

Democracy, more than any other form of government, needs good citizenship. Under an absolutism or a dictatorship, men are forced to fall into line. But in a democracy things are not so simple. Freedom is of the essence of democracy: the completer the democracy, the completer the freedom. But it has to be the freedom of service self-chosen and sometimes of sacrifice self-imposed. That is not the instinct of the natural man; yet somehow that habit has to be acquired. If it is not acquired, the state goes to pieces, and in the end the autocrat appears who coerces its citizens into the duties which they were not willing of themselves to assume.

Here is the explanation of the breakdown of democracy in so many countries of the world. If citizenship does not exist, it has to be imposed. That is a stage through which every nation has to pass. At some time of its history it must go to school and learn the discipline, self-control, team spirit, and other qualities necessary if liberty is to be enjoyed. Hence certain aspects of Fascism, Nazism, Communism, and the authoritarian element in the present government of China. They are stages in the making of national character, a training in qualities indispensable for national existence.

When I say this I may be accused of being a Nazi or a Fascist, these being at the moment, naturally enough, terms of popular abuse. But the charge will be unjust. I have no doubt that democracy is incomparably better than Fascism or Nazism, and that the human race will always move towards it, as the highest form of human society. But it is the most difficult form and it needs certain qualities whose rarity is



shown by its frequent collapse. The Anglo-Saxon democracies seem perhaps to possess them. We seem to have acquired a sufficient quantum of public spirit, justice, fair play, consideration for others, to make democracy work.

Yet I doubt if there is much margin to spare. In England we are justly proud when we think of the men in the Forces, of the spontaneous self-creation of the Home Guard and Air Raid Wardens services, of the conduct of the ordinary person in a queue, of the general law-abiding spirit of the people. We feel less comfortable when we reflect on the black market, pilfering, profiteering both by employers and by employed, workers absenting themselves from work necessary to the economic recovery of the country for fear that they may earn enough money to be liable for income-tax. How can we confirm our virtues and cure our weaknesses and make liberty and democracy secure? What is education doing about it? What can it do?

There is only one way to learn social habits: by living a life in which such habits automatically develop. Live in a society and in most cases you will become a social being. That is the secret of the British boarding school, hitherto the finest factory of citizenship in existence. Boarding schools, like everything else, have their defects, but they do train people to be members of a society; in them the egotist and careerist are discouraged; the individualist discovers the existence of other pebbles on the beach and learns how to fit in with them. A boy finds himself a member of something greater than himself and learns loyalty and service to it. These are the qualities of the good citizen.



Unfortunately in England we have given this or any other training to only a tiny minority, and have turned 80 per cent of the population out on the world at fourteen. The miracle is that they are in general so good; for their defects we are more to blame than they. We should give to the many some equivalent of the training that we have given to a few. Then we need have no fears for democracy.

We are beginning to give such a training. Let me mention some instances and suggest some possibilities. First in time and high in importance is the nursery school, where in infant years the child learns to live in a community. Then the day school, through school societies and common activities, makes its contribution, though in the nature of things it can do much less than the boarding school. The more democratic its internal government, the more its pupils learn to manage their own lives, the better. May not some day schools in the future develop boarding departments, where a boy can spend some part of his school life? But, without this, school camps and camp schools can do valuable work. Scouts and Guides and Youth Movements are important schools of citizenship. Churches, guilds, trade and professional associations, trade-unions—all organizations in which men live as part of something greater than themselves—contribute. A period of national service bringing all classes together in a common life would carry it on. Finally, it would be crowned by residential adult colleges where people would live together, united in common interests and studies.

So far I have argued that we should give everyone a training in the habit of citizenship, I have suggested



that we have neglected to do this, and I have roughly indicated some means by which it might be done. It is an indispensable part of the equipment needed by every citizen. But it is not the only equipment that he needs. Good citizenship and low civilization can go together. The Spartans in the ancient world, the Nazis in the modern, are examples of admirable public spirit and complete devotion to the state. Yet Sparta was not a high civilization, nor do we wish to become a second Nazi Germany.

Without social training no character is prepared for life. But by itself such training is incomplete and even dangerous, unless concurrently men learn to take a master, and the right master. If you ask what I mean by this, I will point to an example where civilized men have taken a master, to their great advantage and advancement. He can be found, presiding, unseen, in any true law court. For in accepting law, men disregard private prejudices and preferences, to serve voluntarily a master called Justice, who is the independent voice of Reason, that judge and litigant alike obey. It is the highest spiritual achievement of collective humanity; 'great as are the evils which society still owes to lawyers, the lawyer class has always been a civilizing agency. Their power represents at least the triumph of reason and education over caprice and brute force.'<sup>1</sup>

But law governs only a part of human life, and outside its kingdom anarchy reigns. To bring more of life under a great master is a major problem of our time. It hardly arises in societies where the mere burden of making a living masters a man's whole life. It hardly arises in totalitarian states, where a dictator

<sup>1</sup> Rashdall, *Mediaeval Universities*, III, p. 457.



tells his subjects whom and what they are to serve. It is less serious in societies governed by good fixed traditions, which no one questions or criticizes. But it is urgent in a world where the basic needs are satisfied. If it takes no master, the marks of such a world, however prosperous it may be, are lack of purpose and drive, a cynical scepticism unsure of itself, a disabling pessimism; if it takes the wrong master, it may exchange these for more spectacular disasters. The second type is a common phenomenon in history; the first is found only in prosperous civilizations, such as the Roman Empire and the advanced nations of our day.

Some men do take a master and serve it with devotion: religion, public or social service, art, literature, science or other activities of the mind, politics, power, money. They tend to be contented and, within the limits of their own powers and of their particular master's kingdom, successful—at least they have a clear purpose to occupy their energies and fortify their minds. Others are masterless men, drifting from one allegiance to another, according to the whim and impulse of the moment; there are two classical portraits in literature of this type—Ibsen's *Peer Gynt*, and Plato's picture, in the *Republic*, of what he calls the 'democratic' man. This type is ineffective, ignoble, in the end unhappy, and, as Plato saw and as the rise of Hitler illustrates, the material out of which, by reaction, dictatorships are made. Most of us probably fall between the two extremes. In judging any individual or nation, the most searching question that can be asked is: 'Whom has he taken for master, and how faithful is his service?'

What master should we take? Whom, even when



we do not obey him, should we admit to be the legitimate sovereign over the whole of life? I would suggest that we might accept excellence as master. You may dismiss such an idea as a high-brow fancy. But in fact it is a general human instinct and practice to pursue excellence. No woman and few men would be pleased if you said that they did not know the difference between good and bad in dress. People interested in baseball or football are not satisfied with the second-rate. People engaged in commerce and industry would be annoyed if you suggested that their methods and organization were inferior. In everything from games to religion, from gardening to politics, there is a quest for excellence, for the first-rate.

A surgeon or a physician is trained by watching masters of the art at work, and learns from their excellence something unforgettable, not to be learned from lectures or books. In a school of architecture or painting, the pupil is shown in reproduction or otherwise the masterpieces of the art. The same principle holds for the teaching of law, of engineering, of every occupation, whether professional or technical: the learner is or should be brought in touch with the best practice of his art or trade, so that he has a standard to judge by, a mark at which to aim. In everything, we think it essential to know the best, however much we may come short of it. Always, soon or late, humanity turns to excellence as naturally as a flower turns to the sun: mankind crucifies Christ and executes Socrates, and they die amid derision and hatred; but in the end they receive the homage of the world. The first-rate is the accepted goal of humanity.



There are four fields in which excellence is the concern of everyone. First, a man should know the highest standards and best methods in his own job, so that he may do it as well as he can: professional pride, a sense of craftsmanship, are acknowledged virtues. But if he goes no further than this, he is a limited human being. Important parts of civilization are art and architecture, music and literature—flowers that grow out of the nature of man, reveal his character and adorn it; there too we should know what is first-rate and not be taken in by the second- or third-rate.

Next, if we are to have a first-rate community, everyone should know what is first-rate in national life and have an idea of the kind of state the Divine Architect might create with perfect human beings; then he will have an overruling ideal to guide him. With such an ideal, slums, disease, uneducated masses, hideous industrial towns, a disfigured countryside, would never have been or would have vanished long ago. It is common to sing Blake's words:

I will not cease from mental fight,  
Nor shall my sword sleep in my hand,  
Till we have built Jerusalem  
In England's green and pleasant land.

An excellent ambition; but the building of Jerusalem needs mastery of design as well as laudable aspirations. It is part of patriotism to love the country one has, but part also to know how to make it really worthy of love.

Finally, everyone should know what is first-rate in human character and conduct, for on the achievement of this everything turns. Most people are fortunate



enough to meet living examples of the first-rate in character. But the great sources of our knowledge in this field are religion and the subsidiary realms of literature, history, and the arts. A school or university which fails to show its students something of these models of human excellence sends them into life ignorant of the knowledge which they need most, and neglects the chief duty of education.

To sum up: my thesis has been that in most modern educational schemes the training of character, if not neglected, has been given a subordinate place; that we have very little, if anything, like the concentration on it in Plato's thought and in Arnold's practice; that nowhere have the tactics of attack been methodically thought out, though it is the crucial point, and should therefore be the centre of our system; that it needs exact and thorough study; and that we ought to undertake this study without delay, for time presses. When the atomic bombs fell on Japan, we had a glimpse of the precipice on whose edge we stand.

Our task in character training falls under two heads. We have to develop the qualities necessary for life in a community. But, by itself, such training has two dangers: it might produce either a world of human bees or ants, efficient but limited and static, or a highly disciplined mass like the Nazi youth, whose social virtues were directed to disastrous ends. Hence the importance of knowing the right end; and the right end is the first-rate in every province of life. This is the greatest of all branches of knowledge, and it should be the centre, though it is not the whole, of education.

May not the desire to make first-rate human beings and a first-rate society replace, or rather carry on, the



spirit which united and inspired us in the war and be a master whom all would accept? Is not that in itself a sufficient motive for life? To see the vision of excellence, so far as our limitations allow; to get at least a glimpse of the unchanging values of the eternal world as they are revealed in whatever is beautiful and good in the material world of earth; to attempt to make one's infinitesimal contribution towards a society which will embody them more fully than does our own—to do that is to take seriously the tremendous words of Christ: 'Be ye therefore perfect, as your Father in Heaven is perfect.'



### III. EDUCATION FOR A CIVILIZED DEMOCRACY

The end of the state is not mere life; it is, rather,  
a good quality of life. ARISTOTLE

**W**E are living in the era of the greatest social change in modern history. This, whether we notice it or not, whether we like it or not, is the distinguishing feature of our time. A new order is being born and sets us, its parents or at least its guardians, some responsibility in determining the future of this portentous birth.

Perhaps the best political epigram of recent years is Mr Henry Wallace's saying that this is the century of the common man. The coming of his century can be seen far back in the extension of the suffrage and later in the development of social legislation. For many years all men have been equal before the law: in Britain every adult man and woman has the vote; we are slowly creating economic democracy, that is, such a measure of economic freedom that poverty prevents no one from taking his part in public affairs or enjoying the facilities, educational and other, which the State provides for all. It might seem that when this is achieved our work is done, and politicians are apt to speak as if this was so. In fact it is only the beginning. We shall have made a political and economic democracy, but this is only the scene-shifting and stage arrangement, which precedes the play, and we have little idea what the play will be or how the actors will perform. When we have created a political



democracy, we shall still have to create something which has only once existed in history and which does not yet exist in either Britain or America—a democratic civilization. It will be by our success or failure in this that history will judge us. The scene-shifting is necessary, but it is not the play.

What play will the common man put on the stage? What will he make of his century? Politics will pass increasingly under his control. Has he the knowledge, the qualities of character and intelligence to form sound judgements on complex political problems at home and abroad? More important still perhaps, is he capable of making a great civilization? Inevitably our civilization must adapt itself to his interests, tastes, desires and capacities and will rise or fall according as they are high or low. He will not write the play, but the actors will be drawn from his ranks. What kind of drama will they be willing or able to act, or will this vast audience demand or tolerate? We can see the influence of the common man already: journalism, which in the last century paid little attention to him, now writes down to his comprehension and tastes, with the result that the London papers with the largest circulation today are on a lower level than any published half a century ago. These, and the average film and other new creations and characteristics of recent years, like the betting pools, disclose certain results of the common man's arrival and reveal our problem. In some ways the level of our civilization has risen, in others it has fallen.

Our current conception of democracy is inadequate. Political equality, economic freedom are stages on the road to it but not its goal. A further freedom and equality are needed, freedom of access and equality in



all those activities which ennoble and adorn life. Without that we cannot have a great civilization or indeed civilization at all.

You may ask what I mean by a civilized nation. I do not mean one which is merely well-fed, well-housed, with enough work to use some of its energies and enough amusement to keep it out of mischief in leisure hours. The populace of the Roman Empire which had all these things was not civilized. Civilization has been defined as a sense of values, and if this sense of values extends to the field of the character, as well as of the intellect and imagination, the definition is correct. The most highly civilized nation is the one whose values are highest, which knows the first-rate and achieves it in the qualities and activities which crown human life. Best of all if it can create the first-rate. In the field of art and literature, thought and science, the first-rate will not come at call. It is the prerogative of the few, and, so far as art and literature are concerned, of favoured ages. Homer, Plato, Dante, Shakespeare, Michelangelo and Beethoven are not born every day. Still, if we cannot command the first-rate in these fields, we can recognize and honour it, and it is the mark of civilized people to do so. But there is one field in which every human being can create the first-rate—the field of character. The great virtues are not limited to genius: they are within the range and reach of all. That is one of the great discoveries and messages of Christianity.

If then civilization is a sense of right values and, so far as possible, their achievement, we cannot be content with mere political democracy, or with a State where the few are civilized and the many merely employed, fed, and amused: we should aim at a



community whose life throughout is first-rate. Our problem is seen as one of human character in its widest sense. Such a community has never existed, nor in perfection is ever likely to exist. But there is one example in history of a democracy which has been more than a mechanism of government to secure to all a voice, or at least a whisper, in the conduct of the State, which has deliberately sought and in large measure achieved a real civilization that reached and included the common man. 'This is why the spectacle of ancient Athens has such profound interest for the rational man; that it is the spectacle of the culture of a people. It is not an aristocracy, leavening with its own high spirit the multitude which it wields, but leaving it the unformed multitude still; it is not a democracy, acute and energetic, but tasteless, narrow-minded and ignoble; it is the middle and lower classes in the highest development of their humanity that these classes have reached. It was the *many* who relished those arts, who were not satisfied with less than those monuments. In the conversations recorded by Plato . . . which for the free yet refined discussion of ideas have set the tone for the whole cultivated world, shopkeepers and tradesmen of Athens mingle as speakers. For anyone but a pedant, this is why a handful of Athenians of two thousand years ago are more interesting than the millions of most nations our contemporaries. Surely, if they knew this, those friends of progress, who have so confidently pronounced the remains of the ancient world to be so much lumber, and a classical education an aristocratic impertinence, might be inclined to reconsider their sentence.'<sup>1</sup> Matthew Arnold's words bring out my

<sup>1</sup> *Mixed Essays*, p. 39.



point that Athenian democracy succeeded in diffusing a high civilization through the masses of the people. It should be instructive to study this achievement of something that we have yet to achieve, and I propose to say a few words about it.

In considering what Athenian democracy was we may start with the definition of its ideal by Pericles. 'Our constitution,' he says, 'is called a democracy because it is in the hands not of the few but of the many. But the laws secure equal justice for all in their private disputes. As for social standing our practice is that a citizen who has recognized ability in some field gets public preferment—it is a question of his qualities, not of his rank. As for poverty, our practice is that if a man can do good work for the community, humbleness of condition is no bar.'<sup>1</sup> No better description has ever been given of liberal democracy as the Anglo-Saxon peoples in their best moments understand it. Everyone, whatever his class or his capacities, has an equal voice in the government of the State: yet free enterprise is part of the ideal; there is no dead level of equality, but ability and character get their natural rewards: the question asked of a citizen is not, who are you, how much money have you got, who were your parents, but, what can you contribute to the common stock of the State?

And indeed in Athens men did contribute. They earned their livelihood as farmers, craftsmen, traders, business men. But they did much more. They were citizens in the fullest sense, voting in the *ecclesia*, or parliament, of Athens and sharing in her administration to a degree impossible in any but a small community. They served without question in her armies

<sup>1</sup> Thucydides. II. 37.



and fleets. They took their part in the great religious festivals which consecrated her life. Her temples and public places, built on a scale of magnificence out of all proportion to the simplicity of their private houses, belonged to them. Their small city produced a drama and literature which has never been surpassed. It was the work of a few men of genius, but it was shared by all and not the property and interest of a small educated élite; year by year the whole population assembled to see on the stage masterpieces dealing with the deepest problems of religion, morals and social life—masterpieces which never attempted to be ‘popular’, made no concessions in style or subject to lower tastes, but gave the common people the very best and were accepted by them. It is difficult to see what element in a complete human existence was absent from the life led, not by the minority of Athens but by its ordinary people; and the people, feeling that the city was theirs, served her with a passionate and unselfregarding ardour.

It is such a conception of democracy that we should have in mind in this task which has now come upon us of building a true democracy with far richer material resources, with two thousand more years of history to learn from, and with Christianity added to the light of nature by which the Greeks walked; and we should aim at making a better society than Athens ever knew.<sup>1</sup>

How was it done? We can trace the political evolution of Athens from a dictatorship to an oligarchy

<sup>1</sup> I will not dwell on the suggestion that Athens can mean little to us because it was a slave-owning State further than by remarking that Washington, Jefferson and Hamilton do not lose their significance for us because they also lived in a slave-owning State, and themselves owned slaves.



and thence to a complete political and economic democracy. Such a development can be seen in other peoples. But what was the secret of this high democratic civilization which accompanied it in Athens? Materially the Athenians were far poorer than we; they had no applied science, no big industry. More surprisingly still, they had no organized education beyond the elementary stage, and not even that for any but a small class, no universities, no high schools. Examinations, without which we believe education to be impossible, did not exist. It is not likely that many Athenians could even read or write; and if they could there were very few books, and these only in manuscript form. How could any intellectual life exist in such conditions? How could writers like the great dramatists—the wonder of the later world—come into being or be intelligible to their countrymen? These questions are surely interesting, not only for their relevance to Athens, but for the general light they throw on the nature of what we call culture.

I have mentioned some things which we consider indispensable and which the Athenians were without: let me now mention some things which they had and we have not at all or in less measure. If they did not read, they talked; their education came not through schools or books but through discussion. St Paul, visiting Athens five centuries later, remarked that 'the Athenians spent their time in nothing else but either to tell or to hear something new'. The same thing was going on, five centuries earlier, in the market place and the gymnasium (that curious mixture of a sports-ground and a club), and is going on today in the cafés of any Greek town. Nor was it all ephemeral talk. The whole philosophical work of Socrates was carried



on through conversation; every treatise of Plato is written as a conversation; the great philosophical schools of the Academy, of the Porch, of Aristotle and Epicurus, thought and taught in an atmosphere of personal intercourse; as though a modern university dispensed with libraries and lecture halls and kept nothing except its common-rooms. There is much to be said for the method. In discussion a man finds out what he does not know, what he has overlooked, where he is mistaken, and—not less important—what he does really know and believe, where he is right; the soft strata of mere opinion are washed away by the steady spray of argument, and the hard rock remains. In discussion too he shares new experiences, and, in commerce with stronger minds, is lifted to higher levels and discerns new landscapes in the world of being. Much of this can be had through books, but not all. They suffer from the grave disadvantage of not being able to ask or answer questions.

The value of discussions depends on the intelligence of those who discuss, and no doubt much talk in Athens would have been subject to Dr Johnson's censure on Dodd's sermons, 'They were nothing, Sir, be they addressed to what they may.' But there was another form of education in which all Athenians shared, the debates in the Assembly. Imagine (by some as yet inconceivable invention of science) the whole electorate of a country able to attend, speak, and vote in Parliament, able to hear every question of foreign and domestic policy debated by the best speakers of the day. That in effect is what happened at Athens. We have nothing comparable, for party meetings and radio speeches, in which no debate



follows and arguments are not immediately challenged, are not equivalent to the actual participation which was part of every Athenian's life. What would be the inevitable result of such a system? A considerable rise in the level of speaking—a mass meeting would not tolerate the kind of oratory from which a member of Parliament takes refuge in the smoking room;—an immense increase of political interest and intelligence in the audience; and a clear idea and a shrewder judgement about the issues involved. Political life is always keener in a small community than in a huge country whose citizens probably do not know the faces or even the names, much less the characters, of most of their representatives. The Athenian voter was far more at home in politics than our average elector. One can judge his competence from the high level of contemporary oratory. Even if we reject the speeches in Thucydides,<sup>1</sup> those of Demosthenes and others have a freedom from claptrap and mere rhetoric, a reliance on solid and close reasoning, which are rarely found in modern harangues to mass meetings. Some of the greatest speeches in the world were made in this small city. The masses at Athens had been trained by their political system to demand what our educated audiences expect.

This is one element in the life of every Athenian. He was educated in politics with a completeness, perhaps impossible to us and certainly not yet achieved. Aristotle calls man 'a political animal'; the words certainly apply to his nation. And to be educated in politics is something more than to understand the questions which parliaments discuss; beyond the lower

<sup>1</sup> There is no reason to doubt Thucydides' statement that his speeches give the substance of what was actually said.



levels of practical needs and immediate issues the great peaks of religion, morals, law are revealed with their pure air and fertilizing streams.

Then there was education of a different kind, to which Pericles alludes when he says that 'no other city provides so many recreations for the spirit, games and sacrifices all the year round, and beauty in our public buildings to cheer the heart and delight the eye day by day'.<sup>1</sup> There was the great architecture, even in its ruins a place of pilgrimage for the world. There were the numerous festivals, pageants of ritual and religious symbolism, to which the nearest modern parallels are the festivals of the Roman Catholic Church. Finally, there was something to which we have no parallel, the tragedies and comedies at the festivals of Dionysus, rooted in religion but in no way narrowed, fettered or distorted by it. Conceive a Shakespeare, but a Shakespeare whose plays have religion as their background, and, further, are, to a large degree, studies in problems of morals and politics, and yet remain great drama. The subject of the earliest extant Greek tragedy—the *Suppliants* of Aeschylus—is the rights of the weak, the question whether a State should risk war in order to help the oppressed. Play after play deals with such problems; the clash between the will of the State and higher laws; the eternal human tendency to corruption by prosperity, and its nemesis; the problem of reconciliation and atonement for wrong-doing; war in many aspects—the triumph of a great national victory, the sufferings of the vanquished, the debasement of the victor by success. Even comedy dealt not only with the actual politics and personalities of the day but

<sup>1</sup> Thucydides, II. 38.



also with its serious issues. Greek tragedy was drama at its greatest, but it was also religious, moral and political speculation; and it was one element in the education of the Athenian people. It is idle to present ideas in abstract shape to the mass of mankind: only through the concrete form of parable and symbol, of art and poetry, can the ordinary man, or perhaps, any of us, in the deepest sense apprehend them. They were so presented at Athens. Who can measure the effect on the mind of these plays year by year enacted, of this profound thought, this sublime poetry—lifting ‘the veil from the hidden beauty of the world’<sup>1</sup>—something absorbed rather than understood. The substitute for this in modern popular life is the cinema!

Politics then, religion, art, drama were shared by every Athenian and woven into the entire national life. That is the way to make a civilized democracy; that is the explanation of ‘the spectacle of the culture of a *people*’, which existed at Athens, which does not yet exist in our democracies: perhaps, so far as art and drama are concerned, the nearest approach to it is being made in modern Russia.

We cannot of course revive ancient Athens; that mould was broken with the passing of the city state, and modern conditions are too different to allow its remaking. But it remains as a challenge and an ideal, a pattern of what a democracy can be, and something can be learnt from the methods which made it. We ought to be able to improve on it; for since those days the human race has had the experience of more than two thousand years to learn from; Christianity has enriched its spiritual ideals, and applied science

<sup>1</sup> Shelley, *Defence of Poetry*.



provided it with infinitely greater material resources. What equivalents have we for the political, artistic and spiritual elements in the education of Athens?

Consider politics first. Here we have different, but perhaps better instruments at our disposal, which we have not yet fully used. The meetings in the ecclesia enabled every Athenian to hear political problems debated by the ablest men of the day, and to make his own contribution in the debate. The radio can do something very similar: we can hear political leaders expound their policies. The speakers are more likely to tell the truth at the microphone where they are conscious of speaking to an independent and even critical audience, than in Parliament where they are supported by the massed battalions of their parties, which are not independent and apt only to be critical of departure from the party creed; a further check on mendacity, humbug and rhetoric is provided by the knowledge that their opponents will be able to reply; and as we listen, we can form some opinion not only of the intelligence but of the good faith and the character of the speakers. The influence of political broadcasts on elections is already considerable. But the radio has an advantage over the ecclesia. It enables us to hear not only the politician, but experts and independent speakers, who have no party axe to grind, no party whip in the background to apply the lash to the back of the party heretic: we can hear not only pro and con but also *tertium quid*. In so far we are much better off than the Athenian who listened in the ecclesia to Cleon and Nicias but not to Socrates.

The weakness of the radio is that the audience listens but does not discuss. It does not provide that fine spray of debate, playing incessantly on the



speaker's statements, detecting weaknesses, washing away what is not solid and sound. This the Athenian had, but we have not: or rather we have it in a lesser degree and might have it in a greater. We have it in the private talk of individuals and groups: the English public-house for instance, especially of the countryside, where the village gathers in the evening, is a miniature ecclesia, whose debates range over many sides of life. Its weakness—and that of similar informal discussion groups—is that normally it is an uninstructed ecclesia; outside local topics, no one is an expert; ignorance too often argues with ignorance, and the resulting sparks do not illuminate a subject brightly. One cannot count on the presence of a local Socrates. Still it would be unjust to depreciate, because of some roughness in their construction, cradles in which the growing democracy of England has been rocked. But the weakness remains; in group and individual discussions, especially on religious, political and economic subjects, knowledge as well as discussion is needed.

The need is met by adult education, especially of the W.E.A. class type, which provides both an expert and a discussion and an atmosphere as impartial as ordinary human nature allows. The W.E.A. has received the supreme compliment of being simultaneously accused of being a seedbed of socialism and of betraying the interests of Labour to Capitalism. Its refusal to be partisan is the more striking because it was primarily a working-class movement and the views of its members were as naturally 'left', as those of the well-to-do are naturally 'right'. Its service to political democracy in England cannot be overestimated. Its great weakness is one for which it is in no



way responsible; it only touches an intellectual élite. That élite is better provided for in England than in Athens: the opposite is true of the mass of the electorate, for whose political education England has hitherto done nothing; though a hand-to-mouth, improvised beginning has been made since 1939 in Army Education. If the mass of our voters show a sound political judgement, it does not come from anything that we have done for them. Here is our great political weakness, yet to be tackled, and only to be tackled through a nation-wide system of adult education.

Comparing the political education of England and America with that of Athens, we may say then that in some respects ours is superior, in others worse. They gave the whole citizen body a training in the art of politics, we train a small minority more thoroughly. We might have done worse; we could do infinitely better, if we chose to take adult education seriously. But if, passing from politics, we think of the other influences that make a civilization, the comparison is less favourable to us. Take the two mentioned by Pericles, the religious festivals and great architecture. It would be hardly fair to invite the public or private buildings of Birmingham, Manchester, Leeds and Glasgow to compare themselves with the Propylaea and the Parthenon, though their communities are far richer and more populous than Athens, and their citizens deserve something better than they have got. And of course there are cities whose inhabitants day by day can see in their own streets what great architecture is. But, at least in England, our ancestors rather than ourselves have the credit for our noblest buildings and most beautiful



towns. And where we have fine modern cities, Athens had one advantage over them; her buildings were dedicated to the deepest things in her life.

I worked at this lecture on a journey between London and York, and looking out of the window could see every few miles, rising out of the woods and yellow cornfields of the plain, a grey tower or spire, each with its village clustered round it. There, on a much humbler level, was something in the spirit of Athens—for each tiny community a building, sometimes memorable, never mean, associated with the elemental things in life, birth, marriage, death, and consecrating the common round of every day. And as the train swept through Peterborough with its superb Norman cathedral and again as I saw the Minster rising above York, I felt something of what an Athenian must have felt as he saw the columned portico of the Parthenon, the sunlight touching Athena's golden spear. Probably the poor were no better housed in Athens than in East London, but they had only to lift their eyes to see beauty made visible in stone—perhaps the better that it was not their private property but a treasure of the commonwealth shared by all. Inhabitants of Bethnal Green or East Ham see no such vision. We are the poorer if there is in our life no equivalent for the architecture which made Athens beautiful, and surely it should be an element in civic and national pride to see that it is created, and in national education to make people desire and appreciate it. If anyone wishes to see how much such pride and such education is needed, let him compare Oxford as it was thirty years ago and as it is today, and note the thoughtless injury done in a short time to one of the most beautiful cities of the world.



Pass now to consider other cultural influences in Athenian life. We have nothing exactly comparable to Greek Drama. Our theatre is for the entertainment of the minority and does not affect the life of the entire population. It has no religious associations or background—for that we must go back to the religious drama of the Middle Ages,—and it exists chiefly for amusement or recreation. In Shakespeare no doubt we have a writer to match in genius and high seriousness with the great Attic tragedians; but how often is Shakespeare acted? Nor can plays, however good, that were written three hundred years ago, have quite the same effect as newly-minted masterpieces of one's own day, reflecting its thought and charged with its atmosphere. Things may change in the future, are perhaps changing now. Drama and music can be the most powerful natural instruments of popular culture. They appeal to nearly everyone. They are a natural food of spiritual and emotional life that all can digest. They can make the appeal *Sursum corda*, which every age and individual needs constantly to hear. There is no reason why, in some form or another, they should not have again the influence on general life, which they had at Athens and in the Middle Ages. So many problems of today, religious, moral, political, social, call for the reflective and imaginative treatment that the theatre can give. The opportunity and the need may produce the men.

Meanwhile the Churches are the nearest thing in our life to the tragic drama at Athens. That may sound a strange view, and I do not of course suggest that the parallel is exact. But the Churches, like Greek Drama, are democratic; they can reach the whole people and every class in it; week by week they recall



the mind from transient to eternal issues of belief and conduct; and, even if the minister is unequal to his task, the congregation listens to the greatest of religious books, the noblest masterpiece in the English language.

If we have not the Attic theatre, we have three instruments of national education far more powerful than any that ancient Greece possessed. The first is advertisement, which indirectly and to hearers unconscious of the preacher preaches a view of life from every hoarding and newspaper and, in America, even from the air. At its worst, it appeals to our greed, our vanity, our snobbery, our ignorance, our superstition and indeed, to any vice whose help it can enlist in the task of selling goods. On the balance I think that its present influence is strongly against real civilization. I suggest as a subject for a study, 'The perfect human being and the ideal human life, as seen in advertisements.'

More important perhaps—certainly more controllable—are the radio and the cinema. They are the great new forces of the century. They reach everybody and reach them often. For most people the cinema is the twentieth century's substitute for the church—alike in city architecture and in the individual life,—while the radio has replaced the sermon—and much else besides. It depends on the use that we make of these, more than on any other contemporary force, whether we have a civilized or an uncivilized democracy. No public figures have a heavier responsibility than their controllers. They can do great good and great harm. A grocer or butcher who sells adulterated food or bad meat is innocent beside those who corrupt the mind of a nation.



In Britain, radio, allowing for the limitations which the character of its public imposes on it, seems to me to have been a most important instrument of national education, in opening the minds, quickening the intelligence, and raising the quality of popular taste, and to have shown a sense of responsibility and a conscience. One could not say as much for the cinema, a more powerful influence, because it reaches us through eye as well as ear.

Segnius irritant animos demissa per aures  
Quam quae sunt oculis subiecta fidelibus.<sup>1</sup>

Yet the documentary film has shown the unequalled power of the cinema to make us known to each other; it could be used far more to remove the insensibility to our neighbours' lives, trials and problems, from which so much intolerance and friction spring, and thereby to create the mutual understanding and sympathy without which national and international solidarity are impossible. Here is one great virtue of the cinema to set in the scale against many sins.

What safeguard is there against the abuse of the cinema and radio, what security for their right use? One method is through public control of the type of the B.B.C. That, though it has other dangers, would save them from the commercialism which thinks only of profits: but there would need to be great changes in our views and our institutions before the cinema comes under public control. Meanwhile we can watch the working of such a system in Russia, and weigh gains and losses there. But direct control of radio or even film by the state puts too much temptation on

<sup>1</sup> Horace, A.P. 180 (tr. Corrington):

'A thing when heard—remember—strikes less keen  
On the spectator's mind than when 'tis seen.'



our rulers to distort truth in the interests of their policies. A semi-independent corporation of the B.B.C. type is much less dangerous. But a better, though more difficult, way of controlling the cinema is in our power. The stuff which the public gets depends partly on those who control, produce, write for, and act the film. But it partly depends on the public. Let us not devote all our righteous indignation for the wrong type of cinema magnate; let us reserve a little for ourselves. We too have our responsibility. Prostitutes spiritual, intellectual, physical, will always be found, while there is a market for them; when the demand ends, they will disappear. Producers—however bad—will give us, in their own interests, what we ask. Let us help to educate them in the meaning of excellence by demanding what is excellent and refusing what is not. Here again we are thrown back on education, but on an education which shows people what is first-rate and makes them so familiar and at home with it that they dislike anything else. That work must be begun in the schools; the consequences of neglect there are difficult, if not impossible, to overtake. But it must not end there. Though the title of this lecture was Education for a Civilized Democracy, so far I have hardly mentioned education except to remark that the Athenians had very little. But of course the majority of our education does not pass by that name and takes place outside school and university. The home educates, conditions of living and work educate, books, newspapers, films, advertisements educate; above all, public opinion, the accepted standards of good and evil, of right and wrong educate. 'Is not the public itself,' said Plato, 'the greatest of all school-masters, training up



young and old, men and women alike, into the most accomplished specimens of the character it desires to produce?' These agents of education are at least as effective as what goes on in classrooms, for they create an atmosphere which influences continually the sensitive, imitative creatures that we are and moulds us unconsciously to their own likeness. The more important that they—homes, living conditions, books, newspapers, the cinema and theatre, public standards of conduct—should be good and not bad, first-rate not third-rate. Otherwise they will defeat anything that the schools can do.



#### IV. ON SPEAKING THE TRUTH

IT would be a high honour in any case to deliver a lecture which Lord Baldwin and Lord Hailey (a member of my own College) have delivered before me. But it is a special pleasure to have been asked to give a lecture in memory of Sir Robert Falconer, whose personal kindness to a stranger on his first visit here I well remember. There is more than one type of good university president: but there is no finer type than that of which Sir Robert was an outstanding example. Naturally, I saw nothing of his gifts as an administrator, to which the steady and harmonious development of the university under him bears witness. But he was much more than an administrator. Not only was he a distinguished scholar, but he achieved in the fullest sense that rare union of religion and humanism which is the finest flower of any civilization. Those who knew him must have seen in him a microcosm of the qualities and virtues which universities exist to embody. It would be impertinent and irrelevant for one who could not know him as you did to say more. But perhaps I may be permitted to say so much.

The title of this lecture might cover many topics; I had therefore better indicate at once what I propose to talk about.

Different epochs need different virtues; or perhaps it would be truer to say that the composition of the alloy from which human life is forged varies in each stage of civilization. It is reasonable to describe our age as the age of science, taking that word not in the



narrow connotation which it bears today, but in the Latin sense of 'knowledge': an age which in all departments of life, social and political as well as physical, increasingly tries to base itself on knowledge. If so, the virtue which it needs most is truth. Without that it can no more hope to endure, than a bridge whose construction disobeys the laws of mechanics. And this platitude brings me to my subject.

Here you will demand that I should define truth. Not being a philosopher, I shall not attempt such a task. What puzzled Pilate, baffles me, and anyhow I am not dealing with truth in the sense in which he used the word. I mean by it that veracity which does its best to tell the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth; where it is uncertain confesses to uncertainty, where it lacks knowledge does not pretend to it; which is candid and frank, takes no unfair advantage in argument, is careful not to misrepresent an opponent or to ignore the strength of his case and the weakness of its own.

Is truth in this sense the virtue as well as the need of our times? In the field of physical science, the answer is yes. There we have conquered the temptation to let our passions or desires distort reality, and ask only to see things as they are. But when we pass from microbes to men, things are very different. In scientific work misrepresentation or suppression of facts is rare. No one could say as much of writing on political or social questions; here we find ourselves in a different world ruled apparently by different principles, where the law of veracity may be admitted but is habitually broken. Indeed, of recent years it has not been admitted even in the two largest countries in Europe. In Russia we have a secular version of the



mediaeval church. The citizen may criticize details but he 'must keep his mouth shut about the higher policy'. 'The communist postpones liberty of thought to a scheme of human happiness.'<sup>1</sup> No doubt interference with free speech is not the same as falsification of facts. Liberty is not truth; and its denial is not identical with falsehood. But in effect liberty is essential to truth; and liberty is refused in order to set propaganda free. In Russia the world has gone back to an ideal discarded in civilized countries at least a hundred years ago. Liberty of speech, painfully won by struggle and martyrdom, is lost. We notice a vice more quickly and criticize it more severely in an enemy than in a friend. Otherwise it is difficult to see how, so far as truth is concerned—though the aim of the Russian Revolution was far nobler than that of National Socialism—Russia is better than Germany under Hitler. Of both peoples it can be said that their rulers have attempted 'to educate man into a new attitude to life' and therefore 'direct all overt utterance towards the aim and stifle all that runs counter to it'.<sup>2</sup> Professor Bury wrote in 1913, 'The struggle of reason against authority has ended in what appears now to be a decisive and permanent victory for liberty. In the most civilized and progressive countries freedom of discussion is recognized as a fundamental principle.' Apparently not. Mankind has never accepted the Gospel warning not to be afraid of them that kill the body but are not able to kill the soul. Otherwise we should have found Goebbels more shocking than Hitler, and

<sup>1</sup> Sir John Maynard, *The Russian Peasant* (London, 1943), pp. 468, 472. The book is a very sympathetic account of the Russian Revolution.

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*, p. 450.



German propaganda more terrible than German brutality.

But Germany and Russia are not my subject: I have only quoted them to note over how much of Europe a position which was won in the sixth century B.C., lost in the fall of the Roman Empire, painfully and by many martyrdoms rewon, has been lost again, and how calmly we accept it. I will not try to answer whether the end in view, 'the remaking of man in a new image',<sup>1</sup> justifies the renunciation, but will pass to ourselves.

I do not know enough of serious studies on political and social questions to say how far what I have called the principle of veracity prevails in them. I imagine that in general it does so, though I can think of some academic writers on politics who could not honestly claim to comply with the oath administered to witnesses in the law-court; and I have heard respectable people say that history is uninteresting if it is impartial—as if truth were dull! But passing outside academic circles, we are apt to find ourselves in a waste land, where truth, if recognized as a possible ideal, is not a major preoccupation. On controversial issues we do not expect to hear from all politicians or all journalists an impartial statement, which conceals nothing and does justice to opponents.

To say this is not to fall into a defect common and dangerous in democratic societies—that of denigrating their governors. Politicians and journalists are made of as good clay as other men, but their occupation exposes them far more to a weakness to which all men are liable. Consider the class called intellectuals, whose name suggests that in them we find the intellect

<sup>1</sup>ibid., p. 449.



dominant and the ἀρετή or 'virtue' of the intellect fully developed. Consider the *New Statesman*, organ and product of that class. Who goes to that admirably written paper for candour and impartiality? Consider a typical representative of the class, Shaw, the fallen angel of the age, who could have told the truth and has not. Consider Lytton Strachey's *Eminent Victorians*. A critic writes, 'About Macaulay we are sometimes tempted to exclaim, "This is something more than the truth;" about Lytton Strachey we say "This is something less than part of the truth. Strachey moved, by natural instinct, among the demiverities, and the irony of his contemporary fame is that he gained most applause for his most conspicuous deficiency."' <sup>1</sup> Or consider Wells, who was thought, or at least thinks himself, a representative of the scientific spirit, but who has no trace of the patience and objectivity which make it: a bundle of emotions and prejudices, an admirable gadfly, a disastrous guide. All these are intellectuals in the sense that they have intellects and use them; but they do not use them for the prime purpose for which the intellect exists—to discover the truth. Yet these were held by the last generation, and not only by the half-educated in it, to represent progressive and enlightened thought.

I do not think anyone will question the justice of these criticisms. In personal relations veracity is, if not the universal practice, at any rate an accepted rule of conduct: we are shocked if others break it, ashamed if we do so ourselves. But in controversy on social and political problems our standards are very different; there are politicians and publicists who take a

<sup>1</sup> George Sampson, *Concise Cambridge History of English Literature* (Cambridge, 1941), p. 1041.



licence in this field which they would never allow themselves in personal relations; though if we must depart from the truth, it is less disastrous to do so in private than in public life. For—apart from any moral question—inveracity in political and social controversy is such an obstacle to progress; it prevents our ascertaining the facts; it hinders common action. A man does not help the country to find the right road by throwing dust in people's eyes; and in the process some dust is apt to find its way into his own. It is hard enough to find the truth anyhow; it is not made easier if a large number of people are trying to conceal it. There are many obstacles to political and social progress; but a chief one is what I have called inveracity. We hear a good deal today about the need of improving the physical health of the nation. Let us, to this admirable campaign, add one for improving the health of its intelligence, and see what we can do to extirpate a major disease of it and so acquire healthy minds.

Before considering treatment for our disease, we might inquire into its causes. Have we any special conditions or institutions which may breed or foster indifference to truth and which we could remove or alter? I think that we have such institutions, but I am not clear how we could alter them. Dibelius, an acute critic, stresses 'the element of falseness and unreality'<sup>1</sup> in our parliamentary system: the sham fighting in it; the tendency to dress a personal or party combat in the cloak of great moral principles; to make promises which can never be carried out; to attack a policy or a measure, nominally on its merits, in fact because the other party puts it forward; and indeed

<sup>1</sup> Wilhelm Dibelius, *England*, p. 234.



the doctrine that the duty of His Majesty's Opposition is to oppose, if practically useful, is intellectually dishonest. We should allow some weight to this criticism. But when Dibelius goes on to say 'that no one familiar with English parliamentary methods was astonished by the campaign of lies against Germany of 1914-18',<sup>1</sup> we reflect that other systems of government than parliamentary ones seem an even better training for campaigns of lies, and that democratic countries have no monopoly in mendacious propaganda. The party system has a double effect. It encourages and almost demands that each party should misrepresent the other. But the mere fact of debate is a check on misrepresentation. If it goes too far, it exposes itself and discredits its authors. The dictator on the other hand can lie almost without limit: he lies to a silent people; no voice is raised in protest or criticism; he is free to delude his nation and in the end may delude himself. Politicians would not probably agree with Socrates that the uncriticized life is not worth living, but parliamentary government saves them from that life, and they—and we—are better for it.

At the same time party politics do not augment the amount of veracity in the country and we can say definitely that it is difficult if not impossible to combine prominent participation in them with a scientific study of politics. I do not of course mean that a university teacher of politics<sup>2</sup> should not be a member of a political party and vote for it, or even that he

<sup>1</sup> *ibid.*, p. 236.

<sup>2</sup> The following remarks only refer to subjects which fall within the political field. If a professor of physics or physiology is a political leader, his subject may suffer but the intellectual integrity of his teaching runs no risk.



should not sit in Parliament. But to be a political *leader*, and to remain wholly candid and objective, seems to me impossible. The active politician finds himself in an atmosphere already vitiated. The ecclesia, the Senate, the House of Commons are hot-houses unfavourable to objectivity; that plant grows best in a cooler air. In any case, how can a man tell the whole truth if he is a party leader? If he does so, he will soon cease to be one. *Suppressio veri* is an essential element in party politics, and must be accepted by those who enter it. They are in the position of members of a church which allows a man to have his doubts and even his heresies, on condition that he keep them to himself. Imagine a member of the government, who expressed scepticism about a government measure either in Parliament or outside. Will his party trust him? If they were wise, they might perhaps trust him the more; but few people have reached that degree of wisdom, and no mass of men likes being always told the entire truth. He will know that his opponents will drag to the light any views or words of his that can embarrass his side, and that his enemies inside the party will use them to overthrow him. He will be driven to an economy of truth, not only in politics where it is inevitable, but in his teaching and writing where it is disastrous and immoral. I am not disparaging party politicians; I am only saying that a man must be superman if he can be a party leader and yet be, as a university teacher should be, always ready to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth.

But, to revert to my previous point, while admitting that the party system is not a force working in favour of truth, I think that it is the best system of govern-



ment, that its drawbacks must be endured, and that the chief causes of our inveracity are simpler and more general. Among them is want of education. When we reflect that the great mass of the population of Britain ceases education at fourteen and has no opportunity later of systematically acquiring some modicum of the knowledge necessary to a rudimentary understanding of the world and of life, no methodical training in the use of its brains, we shall wonder that we fare as well as we do. An uninstructed public is a temptation and an opportunity for the liar, the charlatan, and the fraud.

What kind of education will help us? A common answer is an education in science. Here is a discipline of which the essence is careful observation of facts, exact recording of them, rigid conscientiousness in inference, elimination of prejudice and passion. Here is our ideal in practice: what more do we want, what better can we find? Make science the basis of education and, apart from any practical benefits we may gain from it, it will give us a public trained in the habits we need, brought up to have the scientific outlook. It sounds convincing. And yet if, borrowing a leaf from the scientific book, we decline to be misled by the glamour of the word science, and turn from *a priori* theory to observe facts, we shall feel less certain. Outside their own field are scientists always scientific? Are they even more so than other people? Are they never wild or partial in their statements? Do they never proceed to conclusions without evidence to justify them? Do they always do justice to the facts of the case? Education in science is no guarantee of the scientific spirit outside the field of natural science, and veracity in this field is consistent with its



absence elsewhere. It is an excellent illustration of the limitations of 'transfer' in education; by 'exercising a mental capacity on a particular subject, we may not strengthen that capacity outside the subject; the strength we gained is not necessarily available for other subjects or in other situations'. There is no reason to suppose that if education were based on science, we should become more veracious in political and social subjects than we are.

If people are to acquire the scientific attitude in dealing with human questions, they will learn it best in the study of such questions, that is, in subjects like literature, history, and politics. And here I should like to stress the value of postgraduate studies. The course leading to the B.A., the 'College' stage in American university education, is the prelude to postgraduate work. It deals with an extensive field, it is wide rather than deep, it gives the student a view of his subject as a whole. It teaches him to search for the important facts and to use them; it gives awareness of general ideas and a power to handle them; it saves the student from the narrowness of specialism and makes him conscious of the vast background in which special knowledge must be set if it is to have use and power; it trains a sense of perspective; and these are essential elements of education. It has only one weakness, but this is a grave one. It gives little idea of what real knowledge is, of the real conditions of a true induction, or of the complication and variety of phenomena on which it rests; it is a training in many virtues of the mind, but not in the crucial virtue of intellectual humility. It is an education for the publicist's life, for journalism *in excelsis* and not for the pursuit of truth. Postgraduate work is a corrective to the glib



promptness, the attractive but dangerous facility which is the defect of the quality of 'College' education. It sets the student a narrow problem, sufficiently restricted for him to master all the relevant facts. The pursuit of truth takes the place of wide generalizations and of the manipulation of ideas, and the real meaning and the difficulty of knowledge are revealed to him. These studies too have their dangers. Uncorrected, their methods may tend to excessive specialism, and the absolute value of most doctorate theses is justly derided. But they have value to their writers if not to the world. These exact inquiries into trifling subjects, this meticulous and exhaustive collection of facts do at any rate give the worker an idea of how difficult knowledge is; it is a discipline in laborious industry and intellectual conscientiousness, of a kind that is not fostered by our undergraduate courses. The growth of postgraduate study—still incomplete in Britain—is therefore to be welcomed. It supplies an element lacking in our higher education in the past. It is a training in the scientific method as applied to human studies and in so far is a check to inaccuracy. But it is no panacea. Germany in the nineteenth century was the chief European school in methods of research. Yet when the Great War broke out, German professors, world-famous masters of their subjects, forgot all the lessons of their intellectual discipline, the laws of evidence and the meaning of truth, and indulged in 'repulsive shouts of sheer passion'.<sup>1</sup>

In any case, postgraduate training only touches a small class, the intellectual leaders of the nation—

<sup>1</sup> Friedrich von Hügel, *The German Soul in its Attitude towards Ethics and Christianity*, p. 8.



though that class is very important and its attitude and outlook, through our educational system and in other ways, affect the national mind. But clearly, for direct influence on the great public, we must look elsewhere than postgraduate studies and I must now consider remedies of more general application.

Let us assume that a purpose of education is to develop veracity. One obvious method is deliberately to train the pupil to discern where a statement, or how much in a statement, is more than an excited expression of emotion, when it is the voice of a rational being in possession and use of his reason, when it is only the noise of an animal, the scream of a child. Any daily paper will serve for such training: a comparison can be made of the news with the leader based on it, or of the news given in one paper with that in others. Or again a pupil can be given a preface of Bernard Shaw or a book of Wells and be asked to separate the corn from the chaff. That at any rate will induce a critical habit of mind.

Here I must diverge from my subject to dwell on a danger incident to any training of the critical spirit. In developing it, we may overdevelop it, we may kill the creative, active instinct in those in whom it is weak and induce a habit of mind which says No to life instead of Yes. Plato foresaw this danger.

If you do not want [he says] to be sorry for your pupils when they have reached the age of thirty, you must be very careful how you introduce them to philosophical discussions. You must have seen how the young, when they get their first taste of it, treat argument as a form of sport solely for the purpose of contradiction. When someone has proved them wrong, they copy his methods to confute others, delighting like puppies in tugging and tearing at anyone who comes near



them. And so after a long course of proving others wrong and being proved wrong themselves, they rush to the conclusion that all they once believed in is false.<sup>1</sup>

Profoundly true. We have all met such persons. Late in life they may become intellectual mercenaries, ready to sell their brains to the best bidder; or they may be destroyers, delighting in destruction. There is such a thing as intellectual sadism.

This over-critical attitude can be found, especially among the abler minds, in the higher forms of secondary schools and in universities. It believes itself to be a dislike of shams, sentimentality, and affectation, a ruthless determination to reach truth. Its first reaction to any claim to greatness is suspicion. It looks behind the surface for mean motives and hidden corruptions, it watches for the crumbling of idols and the skeleton in the cupboard. It can be found in all ages when intelligence has been sharpened. Aristophanes complained that Euripides taught the clever youth of Athens 'to think evil, to question everything'.<sup>2</sup> Goethe saw it as Mephistopheles, *der Geist der stets verneint*, 'the spirit of eternal negation', the uncreative spirit. Selma Lagerlöf personified it in 'the inquisitive spirit of self-criticism. We thought of him, with his eyes of ice and long bent fingers, he who sits within the darkest corner of the soul and tears our being to pieces. Bit by bit, the long hard bent fingers had torn away, until our whole self lay like a heap of rags, and our best feelings, our deepest thoughts, all that we had done or said, had been searched, explored, taken to pieces, gazed at by the

<sup>1</sup> Plato, *The Republic*, p. 538.

<sup>2</sup> Aristophanes, *The Frogs*, l. 957.



icy eyes; and the toothless mouth had sneered and whispered—"Behold it is rags, only rags." "

This spirit has haunted the twentieth century. Here is a description of it by the great Russian writer Chekhov. 'Lift the robe of our muse, and you will find an empty void. . . . We paint life as it is, but beyond that nothing at all. . . . We have neither immediate nor remote aims, and in our soul there is a great empty space. We have no politics, we do not believe in revolution, we have no God.' There are many such passages in his letters, lamenting yet facing his predicament with that sensitive integrity which made him, as Janko Lavrin calls him, 'the poet of futility'. It is significant that the plays of the man who felt like this have been favourites in our intellectual circles. The intellectuals, to whom in a civilization like ours leadership naturally falls, have suffered worst from the disease; the creation of the word 'debunking' is characteristic of a period when men with more resources in their hands than any previous age were depressed, despondent, and cynical. Nor was the mood confined to the intellectuals.

Lately I received within a fortnight of each other two letters that illustrate my point. The writer of the first was in command of an Officer Cadet Training Unit and, later, as president of a War Office Selection Board, had the task of choosing potential officers for training; he says: 'The work entails a private interview with men of all ages between 18 and 45, drawn from every conceivable school and occupation. Exploring these minds, endeavouring to assess these values, has been a profound education. The deepest impression left on me is the general lack of any vision of greatness or any sound basis on which to form true



values.' These words refer to the officer class. The second letter, from a private in the Women's Services, says in a different way the same thing about the rank and file. 'People—I am continually coming up against them—seem to lack a clear belief or any philosophy. It is surprising and courageous how they push along at all: several have said, "What is the point of living?" and, "What are we here for, and how can it have any purpose?" And they say it in no particular despondency of the moment, but because they really have no formed idea.'<sup>1</sup> How are such people to build a new world; they have no model by which to construct it, no energy of faith to bring them through difficulties and disappointments to final success.

Want of faith is of course an endemic disease of the world. You find it in Shakespeare among the soldiers of Henry V's army.

KING HENRY. I heard the king say that he would not be ransomed.

WILLIAMS. Aye, he said so, to make us fight cheerfully: but when our throats are cut, he may be ransomed, and we n'er the wiser.<sup>2</sup>

Yet Henry's soldiers, like the 'potential officers' and privates of today, under the compulsion of war, served, some magnificently, and nearly all creditably, a great cause. The dry bones are sound and strong enough, and when the breath enters into them they live and stand on their feet, an exceeding great army. But without the breath they are brittle and dead.

<sup>1</sup> This paragraph is quoted from the writer's *Plato and Modern Education*, p. 23.

<sup>2</sup> *Henry V*, iv, 1. Mr C. S. Lewis has called attention to the modern relevance of all this passage.



The recovery of faith is a crucial problem of our age. With it we are destined to triumphant and splendid advance, without it to failure and ignominy. 'If ye have faith as a grain of mustard . . . nothing shall be impossible to you.' So, in a different language, said the greatest of German poets: 'The deepest theme of history is the conflict between faith and unbelief. Those ages in which faith prevails, whatever its form,<sup>1</sup> are noble and fruitful for the present and the future. All ages in which unbelief, whatever its form, wins an unhappy victory, vanish and are forgotten by posterity.'

Education must bear its share of blame for contemporary lack of faith, if it either increases susceptibility to it or if it fails to provide an antidote. It increases the susceptibility if it over-emphasizes the analytical, critical element in studies. It is right to teach the pupil to criticize, but it is even more important to train him concurrently to admire. Otherwise the eye is fixed on negatives rather than positives, on evil rather than on good; and that 'simplicity which is the chief mark of nobility of nature'<sup>2</sup> risks being killed. And, ironically, the truth itself is lost.

For truth is not seen by one-eyed people, and still less by those who look first for evil rather than for good. It is a common error to suppose that the critical spirit is the spirit of truth. In fact it is only a necessary preliminary to it—a clearing of the ground for the palace of truth: but when the clearing is done, the palace is yet to build. The over-critical mood is even

<sup>1</sup> Goethe might have modified this phrase, had he seen the effects of the wrong kind of faith in Germany and elsewhere.

<sup>2</sup> Thucydides, 3. 83.



more disastrous than uncritical credulity. It is blind to ignore the evil and suffering in the world or the follies, failures, and crimes of man; but it is equally blind to ignore his great creations, his splendid achievements, his shining virtues. They are just as real and far more important:

The angels keep their ancient places;  
Turn but a stone, and start a wing!  
'Tis ye, 'tis your estrangèd faces,  
That miss the many-splendoured thing .

Admiration of what is good and great is the only sound basis of criticism, for it shows us, by contrast, what to reject.

This then is a real danger in training people—especially the young—to be critical. It is some safeguard if our criticism aims as much—indeed in preference—at detecting truth rather than falsehood, good rather than evil. After all, men wash metalliferous earth to extract ore, not the rubbish in which it is imbedded. The words of Antigone apply in the field of the intellect as well as of life.

*οὗτοι συνέχθειν ἀλλὰ συμφιλεῖν ἔχον*

—‘I was born to join not in hatred but in love,’ and it is a sound maxim to approach any question, in the first instance, positively rather than negatively. It was an admirable trait in the late Baron von Hügel that in criticizing a paper he always began by enumerating the points where he agreed with it before proceeding to disagreement. Jowett rightly urged Matthew Arnold on his appointment as Professor of Poetry, ‘Teach us not to criticize but to admire.’



Let us at any rate beware of hypertrophy of the critical spirit, a disease more dangerous, because more insidious, than its atrophy. The strength of the modern world is in criticism, in analysis, and it is a weakness in modern education to concentrate on these at the expense of even more important things. We can analyse a thing perfectly, rest in our analysis, and lose all feeling of the thing we are analysing: we can understand it in one sense, and yet remain unaware of its deeper nature; as children so often learn botany in schools without ever feeling the wonder and beauty of the flower of which they know every organ. It is this failure to get behind analysis to a sense of the reality analysed that makes religion seem meaningless to many people.

There is a time for criticism, for developing the critical faculty, for minute and exact study of literature and other subjects: it is part of higher, though not of elementary education. But it is not only or mainly to criticize it that we read literature: nor did Shakespeare write his plays in order that they should be studied as textbooks study them. He wrote them—or what is great in them—to express some intense feeling or overmastering vision; and we are not really reading him unless the feeling or the vision is conveyed to us and becomes our own. Criticism is incompatible with such a mood and for the moment destroys it. There is a passage in Ruskin which bears on this and contains an important educational lesson. Few people have felt more intensely about great architecture than he did. Yet this is his description of the effect of his minute study of its details in Venice. ‘I went through so much hard, dry mechanical toil there that I quite lost the charm of the place. Analysis is an



abominable business. I am quite sure that people who work out subjects thoroughly are disagreeable wretches. One only feels as one should when one doesn't know much of the matter . . . I lost all *feeling* of Venice.'<sup>1</sup> I am not arguing against criticism: it has its place: but more important and infinitely more profound than criticism is what I should call the *impact* of great literature or of any kind of greatness. And we should see that people do not miss this impact. Few influences will be more fruitful in their characters and lives.

There is, however, another method of training the critical spirit indirectly, free from the dangers I have mentioned. Everyone who goes through a secondary school course should acquire some idea of the elementary laws of thinking; in fact hardly any do. Yet all of them will need to think; there are right and wrong methods of doing it; and if so, it is desirable that they should know this and know what these methods are. It is strange that geometry and algebra should be regarded as an essential part of education but that logic should not. For many pupils, it might with advantage replace them. I do not propose that a course of elementary logic should be a compulsory subject in the curriculum. My suggestions are very modest—that everyone should learn how to put an argument into syllogistic form; and they should know something about fallacies. If we all had to put our statements into syllogistic form, many would be altered and some never made: we should be confronted with our own absurdities; and that is more salutary than detecting the errors of others.

<sup>1</sup> John Ruskin, *Praeterita*, vol. II, p. 366.



Akin to this discipline is the habit of defining words. Every human being uses words; how often we use them without knowing what they mean! Ask the next person, who speaks of democracy, liberty, religion, education, what exactly he means by the words; in most cases you will be received by silence, by confusion, by evasion, but not by an answer. Yet these words move us violently. They inspire policies, divide nations, create revolutions, and wreck states; and all the while they are little but inarticulate exclamations. They are a dose of adrenalin injected at random into the mind and instantaneously raising the blood pressure. If you want to defeat a proposal, and are not scrupulous about means, label it with a word which automatically arouses the hostility of your hearers. Call a measure Fascist or Nazi to an audience of Liberals, Bolshevik or Communist to a meeting of Conservatives, capitalistic if you are speaking to a Labour group. Ten to one they will not stop to consider the measure on its merits; the words go to their heads and damn it as no rational argument could do. Is it not then elementary common sense that every human being should acquire the habit of knowing exactly what words mean? But you will say, 'Do you wish to dry up the streams of eloquence and to abolish political manifestoes?' I am not sure about the honest answer to this question. Perhaps the best reply is that I wish them to mean more than they do. And I believe that this could be easily achieved, if we learnt at school to define words. There is no surer way of making people think; and the training can begin at an early stage, in the elementary school with simple words such as house, table, food, generous, proceeding as the pupil grows older to the most



dangerous form of explosive—abstract terms such as communism, totalitarianism, liberty, democracy, religious education, etc. A definition a day will keep charlatans away. It is some safeguard to veracity if we can accustom ourselves not to use words unless we know what we mean by them.

My last prescription for veracity is to live with people who tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth—to associate with them so far as we can among the living, and to seek their company among the immortal dead. And in this latter class who stand higher than the great Greek thinkers? Matthew Arnold thought so:

Rigorous teachers seized my youth,  
And purged its faith and trimmed its fire,  
Showed me the high, white star of Truth,  
There bade me gaze and there aspire.

It is not such a paradox as it sounds. Greece created philosophy and science, and did so in a world which knew neither them nor the attitude of mind on which they depend. It is the most colossal achievement of man. But we are not surprised by it when we meet those who achieved it. If you come across the following sayings, to what age would you ascribe them? 'I would rather discover one scientific fact than become king of Persia.' 'Life is worth living because it enables us to contemplate the heavens and the order of the universe.' 'Sobriety and scepticism are the sinews of the mind.' 'It is better to discover one's own errors than those of others.' 'Thought and the freedom which it gives are the end of life.'<sup>1</sup> If the allusion to the king of Persia did not undeceive you,

<sup>1</sup> From Democritus, Anaxagoras, and Epicharmus.



would you date these sayings before the nineteenth century and do you know many sayings in that century which can match them? Yet in fact the latest are earlier than Plato. Here you find, born full-grown like the goddess of wisdom in Greek mythology, the very essence of the scientific temper—its curiosity and passion to know; its desire to see things as they are; its belief in the arbitrament of reason.

These Greeks seem to possess by nature the objectivity which we painfully struggle to acquire—the power which Keats describes,

To bear all naked truths  
And to envisage circumstance all calm.

Yet there is nothing cold about their attitude. How could there be coldness in a passion for truth? A phrase of Plato is characteristic, *καλὸν ἡ ἀλήθεια καὶ μόνιμον*, 'Truth is beautiful and enduring.' There is nothing surprising in the second of these adjectives. But I doubt if it would occur to all of us to call truth beautiful. Yet such a feeling is a greater safeguard to veracity than a training in scientific method or a discipline in the art of thinking. Ignorance, inability to use our minds are not the only causes of inveracity. If education was a cure for it, the educated would not lie. But they do so, possibly more than the uneducated, certainly more ingeniously and persuasively. The intellect is powerful; but it is also weak. 'Quarry the granite rock with razors or moor the vessel with a thread of silk; then may you hope with such keen and delicate instruments as human knowledge and human reason to contend against these giants, the passion and the pride of man.'<sup>1</sup> All our techniques

<sup>1</sup> John Henry Newman, *On the Scope and Nature of University Education*, ch. 4.



fail in the critical hour. The scientist, the German *Gelehrte*, the classical scholar, the master of logic, have only a precarious foothold on the solid rock and lose it easily when the flood of self-interest or emotion pours down. We have to deal with a moral disease, revealing itself by intellectual symptoms.

Veracity, like other virtues, can only rest firmly on a foundation of absolute value. It is secure only in moments when we feel, like Plato, that truth has the same quality as the highest beauty of nature and the greatest works of art; or when we believe that it is commanded or desired by God, or that it belongs to the world of transcendent reality. Then untruth, like every other form of the ugly or the unreal, gives us no permanent satisfaction. Truth itself may be beyond our knowledge or vision, but at least we shall desire to see and tell it. And we shall be saved from the two occupational diseases of the intellectual life: from the purely critical spirit—because that is negative and truth is not negative but positive; from the Ecclesiast's belief that even wisdom is vanity—because the mists of *accidie* disperse before the light and heat of the sun.



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